# TOM THE TELEPHONE BOY

FRANK V. WEBSTER

CHS-(36)R

To Ralph

From Father

Christmas 1922

"Mr. Cutter came in, turning on the electric light as he did so.
*Page* 164.

# Tom the Telephone Boy

## Or

## The Mystery of a Message

BY

FRANK V. WEBSTER

AUTHOR OF "BOB THE CASTAWAY," "THE NEWSBOY PARTNERS," "THE YOUNG TREASURE HUNTER," "ONLY A FARM BOY," ETC.

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# TOM THE TELEPHONE BOY

## CHAPTER I

### A QUEER CUSTOMER

"HURRAH! Good news, mother!" cried Tom Baldwin, as he hurried into the house, throwing his hat on the rack. "Fine luck! Where are you?"

"Upstairs, sewing," replied a woman's voice. "My, Tom, but you are making quite a noise."

"Can't help it, mother! I've got good news! I've got a job!"

"Have you really, Tom? Come right up and tell us about it. I'm very glad!"

"Tell him to be sure and wipe his feet," added another woman's voice, from the same upstairs-room where Mrs. Baldwin was sewing. "The snow's melting outside, and he'll track it all over the house."

"I guess he has already done so, Sallie," said Tom's mother a little ruefully. "He's half-way upstairs now."

"Land sakes! And that carpet only just cleaned! What terrible creatures boys are!"

"Not so very bad, Sallie," replied Mrs. Baldwin with a smile.

Meanwhile, Tom was coming up the stairs with a rush, and when he reached the top he found his mother in the hall waiting for him. He kissed her affectionately, and then followed her into the room from which she had emerged to greet him.

The apartment was a small front one, and contained two sewing machines, and, from the cloth, patterns, needles and thread scattered about, it did not need a sign to tell that dressmaking was conducted in it.

"Hello, Aunt Sallie!" exclaimed Tom, as he prepared to sit down on a chair near the door.

"Mercy! Goodness me! Don't sit there!" cried Miss Sarah Ramsey, Tom's maiden aunt, who was called "Sallie" by Tom and by his mother. "Look out, Thomas!"

"Why? What's the matter? Is there a pin or a needle in it?" asked Tom, as he paused and looked apprehensively at the chair, which contained some fluffy white material.

"Needle! Pin! Why, Thomas Jefferson Baldwin! That's the rucheing for the neck of Mrs. Anderson's new dress, and if you had sat on that, and crushed it, I don't know what I'd have done,"

and Aunt Sallie became positively pale over the thought.

Tom knew she had been much wrought up over the threatened calamity, for she never gave him his full name—Thomas Jefferson Baldwin—unless she was very serious indeed.

"Huh!" exclaimed the boy. "I didn't think that bunch of white stuff was anything."

"There, Tom, I'll take it out of the way," said his mother. "Now you can sit down and tell us all about it."

"Yes, and try and be quiet about it," cautioned his aunt. "When you talk so loud you make my head ache, and my nerves are all unstrung now with trying to get the sleeves in this waist. I never saw such styles as they wear now-a-days."

"Have you really got work, Tom?" asked Mrs. Baldwin.

"Yes, mother, and a good job, too."

"Where is it?"

"I hope it is in some place where you will have a chance to advance, and improve yourself," put in Miss Ramsey quickly. "Boys need improving very much, now-a-days."

"Then this ought to be just the place for it," said Tom, with a laugh. "It's in a book store, and I expect, before long, I'll know enough, from reading the books, to become a school teacher or a professor."

"That would be very nice," remarked Tom's aunt, as if he really meant what he said.

"Have you really got a place in a book store, Tom?" inquired his mother, as she threaded a sewing machine, preparatory to doing some stitching.

"Yes, in Townsend's Book Emporium, as it's called. It's on Milk Street, and it's one of the largest book stores in Boston. I saw a sign out 'Boy Wanted,' and I went in. I didn't expect to get the place, for I've been disappointed so often of late, but I made up my mind I'd try.

"Mr. Townsend—he's a nice elderly gentleman—asked me a lot of questions, and when I got through answering them he told me to come to work in the morning. Isn't that good news?"

"Indeed, it is," replied Mrs. Baldwin.

"How much will you get?" asked his aunt anxiously. "When I was a girl, boys in book stores didn't get more than three dollars a week."

"Times have changed since then," declared Tom, with a laugh. "I'm to get five dollars. There's only one bad thing about it, though."

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Baldwin.

"I'm only hired during the holiday rush. They want a boy to help out, and that's what I'm to do. I'll have to look for something else after the first of the year. Still, it's better than nothing, and there are four weeks more of this year left."

"I wish it was a permanent place," remarked Tom's mother. "But, of course, as you say, it's better than nothing. Perhaps if you do well, they may keep you permanently."

"I hope they do, mother. But have you any work that you want me to take home?"

"Not yet, Tom. Mrs. Anderson's dress isn't quite finished. There is more work on it than I thought there would be, and it is going to take me a day longer."

"That means you won't make so much money then," said Tom, soberly.

"Yes, that is so. If I had it finished I could sew on that skirt for Mrs. Thompson, and she is prompt pay."

"I can't sew as fast as I once could," remarked Tom's aunt. "I'm afraid I'm not much help to you, Jeanette."

"Indeed, you are!" exclaimed Mrs. Baldwin, kindly. "I don't know what I'd do without you—and Tom."

"If you haven't anything for me to do then," went on the lad, "I think I'll get something to eat. I didn't have any dinner."

"Oh, Tom! Didn't you?"

"No; I saved the money for car fare, as I didn't know how far I'd have to go before I struck a job. Then, when I got this one in the book store, I thought I might as well come home and get a

bite as to go to a restaurant, so I've got the quarter left."

"But, Tom, you must take care of your health," said his mother. "Going without your dinner, to save money, is poor economy. You can't afford to get sick, with two women to look after," and she smiled fondly at her son.

"Oh, I guess it didn't hurt me, mother. But I certainly am hungry now. Is there any jam left?"

"Yes; you'll find it in the pantry."

Tom went downstairs, and was soon rattling away at the dishes in the cupboard.

"Look at that!" exclaimed his aunt, as she pointed to a patch of snow and mud left by Tom's shoes in the middle of the sewing room. "Isn't that awful! Oh, boys are such terrible creatures!"

"I'm glad I have one," declared Mrs. Baldwin fondly, as she wiped up the mud with an old rag. "There are worse things than muddy shoes, Sallie."

Miss Ramsey sighed, but said nothing. Meanwhile, the "terrible boy" was satisfying a very healthy appetite, thinking, between bites, of his good luck in finding work.

For he needed employment very much. Tom Baldwin's father had died about three years before this story opens, leaving his wife and son a small house, in Boston, but no money. Of course, Mrs.

Baldwin could have sold the house, and lived for a time on what she got for it, but she preferred to keep it. She had been a good seamstress in her younger days, and she determined to try to earn her living by dressmaking.

But she soon found that dressmaking, as she had seen it conducted when she was a girl in the country, and the way it is done now-a-days, was quite different. She could barely get enough to do to make a living for herself and Tom, who was too young to go to work, and who attended a public school.

Finding she had not the skill necessary to compete with the department stores and with modern dressmakers, Mrs. Baldwin sent for her maiden sister to come and help her. Miss Ramsey was a better sewer than Mrs. Baldwin, but her health was poor, and between them, the two women could barely make both ends meet.

Much against her will Mrs. Baldwin had to take Tom from school and put him to work. He got a position in an office, where he earned three dollars a week. This helped a little, and as he proved efficient he was advanced until in about two years he was earning eight dollars.

Times seemed better then, for, having no house rent to pay, Mrs. Baldwin got along fairly well on Tom's money, and what she and her sister could earn. But the dressmaking business grew worse,

instead of better, and the two women had to depend more and more on Tom.

Then came a dark day when the firm that Tom worked for failed, and he and many others lost their places. From then on the little family of three had a hard struggle. Had it not been for the sewing the women did, and which just managed to keep them, the house would have had to be sold.

Work was hard to get in Boston, that year, and it seemed with the approach of winter, that times were worse than ever. Tom tramped the streets day after day, looking for a situation, but in vain, although occasionally he managed to get odd jobs to do.

Then came the unexpected, when he saw the sign in front of the book store, applied, and was taken. No wonder Tom felt happy as he rushed home with the good news.

The boy was at Townsend's Book Emporium early the next morning. There were several other clerks employed, and Tom was told by the proprietor, Elmer Townsend, that his duties would be to run on all sorts of errands, to sweep out the store, dust the books, and, in a rush, wait on customers.

"I want you to make yourself as familiar as possible with the books," said Mr. Townsend. "Here is a catalogue, and I have marked on it just what

part of the store each book is in. The price of each book is written on the upper right-hand corner of the first fly-leaf, but as it is in letters, instead of figures, you will have to learn what the letters mean."

Tom thought it was a queer plan to mark the selling price in letters instead of figures, but he was soon enlightened.

"That is done so customers will not know the prices of books," said his employer. "I take a word of ten letters, and each letter represents a figure from 1 to 0. Then, by combining the letters I can make any figure I want. Do you understand?"

Tom said that he did, and he had soon mastered the little problem so that he could, after a little study, tell the selling-price of any book, by looking at the small letters on the first page.

The book store was quite a large one. Tom had never seen so many volumes in one room before, except in a library, and he began to think he had come to just the right place, for he was fond of reading and study, and he made up his mind he would have a good time perusing his favorite volumes.

But if our hero had an idea that clerks in book stores spend their time pleasantly in looking at pictures and reading stories, he was soon disappointed.

He found himself ordered here and there by the

other clerks. He had to bring books from the front of the store to the back, and from the back to the front. He had to get out bundles of wrapping paper, and balls of twine. He had to dust off long rows of volumes, and when a clerk was trying to wait on two customers at once, Tom had to tie up books to be sent to various addresses given by the purchasers. The lad hoped he would be sent out to do some delivering, but he learned that the volumes went by a local express company, with which Mr. Townsend had a yearly contract.

Tom was in the back part of the store, arranging some pamphlets that had been scattered about, when he saw an elderly gentleman walk slowly along the aisle formed by the book tables, and pausing before some historic volumes, take one from the row on the shelves.

"Ha! Um! Here it is!" exclaimed the old gentleman, as he peered through his spectacles at the printed page. "I knew I was right. It isn't there! Here, boy!" he called suddenly, glancing over the tops of his glasses at Tom. "Just you hold this book open a minute, right there, and keep your finger on this line," and he held the volume out to the lad. Wonderingly, Tom complied.

The queer customer ran his finger along the row of books, took out another, leafed it over rapidly, and uttered an exclamation. Then, placing this

book down on a table, and holding it open with one hand, he reached for a third volume, which he extended to Tom.

"Open that at page twenty-one," he said.

"I can't," replied the boy, "unless I let go of this other book."

"That's so, I forgot. Well, give me the first book. I can keep two places at once."

Tom passed it over, and the old gentleman now had two books open before him.

"Have you got page twenty-one?" he asked Tom, as he bent close over the opened books.

"Yes, sir."

"Is there anything on it about the ancient Hickhites having used belladonna in fevers?"

"No," answered Tom slowly, as he read down the page. "This seems to be an account of how to make a fruit cake."

"A fruit cake! What do you mean?"

"This is a cook book, sir," replied Tom.

"A cook book! Goodness me! I must have picked up the wrong memoranda when I hurried from the house."

He rapidly searched through his pockets, and produced a crumpled piece of paper.

"That's what I did," he announced. "I picked up a memoranda made out by my sister-in-law. It's about buying a new cook book she saw advertised. My memoranda was on the use of bella-

donna among the ancient Hickhites. I differed from a certain historian, and I wanted to look it up. I have taken her memoranda, and left mine. Well, well, I must be losing my memory. I'm sorry I bothered you."

"It was no bother at all," said Tom politely.

"I'm glad of it. I hate to bother any one. Now let me see. There was another book I wanted to get. What was it about? I thought I would remember it. I know I had it on my mind when I was looking at the first volume of the new edition of Motley's Dutch Republic—um—er—well, I can't think. I'll have to go back home and get my list."

He took the cook book from Tom, and placing it, with the two other volumes, under his arm, started to walk out of the store. At once there flashed through Tom's mind the idea that this was a slick swindler, who had adopted this method of stealing books.

"Wait a minute!" he called. "Shan't I wrap those books up for you?"

He thought this would be a polite way of calling the attention of Mr. Townsend or some clerk to the actions of the queer customer.

"What books?" asked the old gentleman innocently.

"Those under your arm."

"Have I some books under my arm? Why,

goodness gracious, so I have! I'm glad you called my attention to them, young man, or I might have walked off with them. My, my! but I am getting to have a poor memory! To think of carrying off books without paying for them!"

"It's a good thing I caught him in time, or Mr. Townsend might have blamed me," thought Tom.

Just then Mr. Townsend came to the rear of the store. He caught sight of the old gentleman.

"Why, Dr. Spidderkins! How do you do?" he exclaimed. "I am real glad to see you? What can I show you to-day? I didn't know you were here, or I would have attended to you personally."

"I guess I made a mistake," said Tom to himself.

## CHAPTER II

### TOM IS SUSPICIOUS

GLAD that he had not accused the old gentleman of trying to steal the books, Tom moved away, leaving his employer and Dr. Spidderkins in earnest conversation. Tom could hear them talking about rare editions, first folios, and books or pamphlets that were out of print, and very valuable.

"Here, boy, wrap up this bundle," called a clerk.

"Sure," replied Tom good-naturedly. "Shall I bring it back to you?"

"No, mark this address on it, and put it where the expressman will get it. It's got to be delivered to-day."

"The new boy is better than the other one we had," observed a second clerk to the one from whom Tom had just taken an order.

"He certainly is. I only hope he keeps it up."

The rest of that morning Tom found himself busily occupied. There came a little let-up in the rush, about noon, and the lad ventured to ask the

senior clerk something about the queer old man who was still browsing away among the books.

"He is one of our best customers," replied the clerk. "His name is Dr. Lemuel Spidderkins."

"Does he practise medicine?"

"He used to, but he is retired now, and about all he does is to collect books. Hardly a day passes but what he buys two or three here, or in other book stores. He spends a lot of money that way. You see he's so forgetful he dare not risk practising his profession."

"He certainly is queer," remarked Tom, and he told the clerk his experience with the doctor.

"That's nothing," was the answer. "He often comes in here, and walks off with three or four books without paying for them. If we see him we always politely call his attention to them. If we don't, it doesn't matter, for he generally recollects what he has done when he reaches home, and he sends the money for them. Yes, he is very eccentric."

"Then I did the right thing," said Tom, "when I offered to wrap them up for him."

"Oh, yes. He and Mr. Townsend are great friends. He has bought books of us for years."

"Here—er—new boy—what's your name!" suddenly called the book store proprietor, from where he stood talking to Dr. Spidderkins. "Wrap these books up."

Tom hurried to his employer, and took several large and heavy volumes which the old physician had evidently selected from the shelves.

"Ah, there is the young man who helped me look up some facts about—er—well now, isn't that queer, I can't remember what it was about," said the doctor, as he caught sight of Tom. "Was it about how the Egyptians used to worship cats?"

"It was about belladonna and fruit cake," answered Tom.

"Oh, yes, so it was. Yes, he was quite a help to me—I mean he showed me that I had the wrong memoranda," went on the physician. "I must get a secretary if my memory keeps on failing me. But I must pay you for these books, Mr. Townsend. I'll take them right along with me, or I'll forget all about them."

"Better let me send them," suggested the proprietor of the Emporium. "They'll make quite a heavy bundle."

"Perhaps you had better. Here is the money," and the doctor held out several bills.

"Do you want that book you have under your arm?" asked Mr. Townsend with a laugh, pointing to a small volume, almost hidden by the big sleeve of the doctor's coat.

"Have I a book there? Why, bless my soul, so I have! I remember now, I took it down to look up a certain fact about how the Chinese use

opium to deaden pain in sickness. It is just like a book I have, only mine is an earlier edition. I think I will take this. You may wrap it up with the others. Queer, how forgetful I am becoming. Now be sure those books are up to my house to-night."

"They'll be there," Mr. Townsend assured the physician, as Tom went to the counter to wrap them up.

Dr. Spidderkins took his departure, and soon after this, Tom was told he could go out and get some lunch. He did not eat an elaborate meal and was soon back at his place.

During the afternoon he went on a number of errands, arranged several shelves of books, dusted off long rows of volumes, and waited on one or two customers.

"I'm beginning to learn the book business," thought the lad proudly, after he had made his third sale without an error. True they were only small ones, involving the purchase of a pad, a pencil, and the last one being a small book, purchased by a girl. But they meant a lot to Tom.

"It will be closing time in half an hour," remarked one of the younger clerks to Tom. "Do you live far from here?"

"Not very. About half an hour's walk. But I thought you kept open late during the holidays?"

"We will, beginning next week. It will be ten

o'clock every night then, but we get supper money."

"That's good," remarked Tom.

"Here, what's this!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Townsend, as he saw the bundle of books which Tom had wrapped up for Dr. Spidderkins. "Haven't these books been called for by the expressman?"

"No, sir," replied the clerk, in charge of that part of the work.

"This will never do," went on the proprietor. "The doctor wants the books to-night. Call up the express office and see if they are coming."

The clerk put the telephone into operation, and presently reported to Mr. Townsend:

"He says the man forgot to call on his afternoon trip, and it's too late now."

"That's too bad!" exclaimed Mr. Townsend. "Those books must go to Dr. Spidderkins to-night, or he'll be very much disappointed, and he's too good a customer to disappoint. Tom, you had better jump on a car and take them to him. Do you know your way around the Back Bay district?"

The Back Bay district is the section of Boston where are located the residences of the rich, and it is quite exclusive.

"I guess I can find the place, sir," said Tom confidently, though he had only been in the locality a few times.

"Well, here is your carfare. Be careful of the books now, as some of them are quite expensive. Be on hand early in the morning."

"Yes, sir," answered Tom, as he put on his overcoat, and with the bundle of books, which were quite heavy, he started off.

He was soon in the Back Bay district, and a little inquiry enabled him to find the doctor's house.

"My, it's a big place!" exclaimed Tom. "He must have money to live in a house like that."

He went up the front steps and rang the bell. The door was presently opened by a woman, and, in the light that streamed out into the darkness from the hall, Tom saw that she was about middle age, and that her features were rather sharp and hard. Her face was not made more attractive by the way her hair was arranged, for it was drawn tightly back on both sides of her head.

"Well, what do you want?" she asked snappishly. "We don't want to buy anything, and if you're the boy from the grocery you're too late with the stuff, and you must go round to the back door. I can't have tradesmen coming to the front door."

"These are some books Dr. Spidderkins purchased to-day," replied Tom. "I brought them, because the expressman forgot to call."

"What's that? Books?" asked a voice from

within, that the boy recognized as the doctor's. "Who has books for me?"

Tom caught a glimpse of the elderly gentleman. He was in his slippers and a dressing gown, and his arms were so full of books that he could not have carried another one.

"They are books from Mr. Townsend," said Tom.

"Oh, yes. Come right in," invited the doctor. "I was wondering why they didn't arrive. Come right in with them, my boy. I want to look up something about a certain rare plant——"

"He'll do nothing of the kind!" interrupted the woman. "I guess I'm not going to have snow tracked into my house! Besides, you know you started to go to supper, and there you are puttering over those books. Oh, Lemuel, you're so forgetful!"

"So I am! So I am," admitted the doctor in a queer sort of voice. "I remember now, I did start to go to supper. I knew it was something I ought to do. I'm glad you reminded me. I'll eat at once," and, placing the books he was holding on a chair in the hall, the old gentleman turned back.

"Leave the books here," said the woman to Tom. "Are there any charges?"

"No; everything is paid."

"All right," and she abruptly shut the door.

"Rather a cool reception," murmured Tom. "My, but she's cross! I shouldn't like to live with her. I wonder how the doctor stands it, he's so quiet and studious? I wonder if she's his wife? No, she can't be. The clerk said he wasn't married. She must be a housekeeper, or some relation. My, but she seems to be able to make him do just as she likes! The idea of not letting him take his own books that he bought and paid for. I guess he's so easy that she has him under her thumb."

The time came when this was demonstrated to Tom, even more forcibly than it was on this occasion.

## CHAPTER III

### BUSY DAYS

TOM was on hand so early at the book store the next morning that he found the Emporium had not yet opened. He had to stand out in the street, until the porter came along to unlock the door.

"You're early; ain't you?" the man asked.

"Yes; I didn't know exactly what time I had to begin, so I thought I'd get here as soon as I could. Where will I find a broom? I have to sweep out the place."

"I'll get you one. You want to sprinkle damp sawdust on the floor, and cover up all the books on the tables, so they won't get dusty. Mr. Townsend is a very particular man."

"I believe he is, but I like him—what little I have seen of him."

"Oh, you'll find he's all right," went on the porter, as he opened the door, and showed Tom where to find a broom. Then, while the man went to the cellar to open up some cases of books that had arrived late the previous afternoon, Tom

began his sweeping. He had just finished, and taken the cloths off the books, when the junior clerk arrived. In a short time all the other employes were at their places, and presently Mr. Townsend came in.

"Ah, good-morning, Tom," he said. "I see you have the place in good shape for us. Did you leave the books for Dr. Spidderkins?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, a very fine man he is, very fine indeed, if he is a trifle eccentric. Did he say anything to you?"

"Not very much. He said something about waiting for the books."

"I hope they were not too late."

"I went as quickly as I could with them."

"I know you did, Tom. I mean I hope I sent you off with them in time. The doctor likes to have things the minute they are promised, though, often, after he has them, he forgets all about them. Was he much put out?"

"Not very. I didn't have a chance to say much to him, as the lady who answered the door told the doctor it was time for his supper."

"Ah, I dare say he had forgotten all about it. That's his way. What did the woman say? She is his sister-in-law, I believe, though she has married a second time."

Tom related as much of the conversation as he could remember.

"Hum," mused the bookseller. "She's a strange woman—very strange. Well, I guess the books got there in time. Now, Tom, I want you to go on an errand for me."

When Tom got back from having taken some books to a customer who was stopping at the Parker House, he found the Emporium a busy place. There were a number of customers present, for the holiday rush was on, and all the clerks, and Mr. Townsend, were engaged in showing books, or wrapping up parcels.

Seeing that Mr. Townsend was busy, Tom decided to defer for the present reporting on the result of his errand. He hung up his coat and hat, and as there seemed to be nothing else for him to do, he proceeded to tidy up a table of small booklets, that was usually in disorder, as customers were continually looking over the stock.

While he was thus engaged he was approached by a young man, whose clothes were of expensive cut and material.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in a peculiar drawling accent, "but would you kindly get me a volume of Browning! I can't seem to locate it amid all the maze of books here, and all the clerks seem to be engaged. I presume I am right in assuming that you are employed here?"

"Browning, the ball player!" exclaimed the young man.

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"Oh, yes, I work here," answered Tom, who paid little attention to accent. "But I've only been here two days, and I don't know much about the books yet."

"Then perhaps you can't find for me a volume of Browning?"

"I guess I can," said Tom confidently. "I'll look in my special catalogue," and he produced the one Mr. Townsend had arranged for him. "Browning, the baseball player, you mean, don't you?" he asked, for there was an athlete of that name, who had made quite a reputation for himself in the New England circuit that fall.

"Browning, the ball player!" exclaimed the young man, as if horrified.

"Yes, the one that played short. He's got the highest batting average——"

"Don't! Don't, my dear young man; don't I beg of you," spoke the customer, waving his hands. "Baseball is such—such——"

"It's a bully game!" exclaimed Tom, enthusiastically. "I used to be captain of a team, when I went to school. Tim Browning——"

"No, no! I mean Browning, the poet," said the young man hastily. "I want a volume of his verses to send to a young lady. She is very fond of him. So am I."

"Oh!" said Tom suddenly, much enlightened. "I thought you meant the other Browning. I was

looking for the book among the sports. I'll turn to poetry. Yes, here it is," he added a moment later, as he found it in the catalogue. "I'll get it for you."

He got several different styles of the poet's work and handed them to the young man.

"Ah, that is what I want!" he exclaimed. "Don't you think his poetry is simply perfect?"

"I—I don't care much for poetry," replied Tom, who, since he worked in a bookstore, did not want to confess that he had never read a line of Browning.

"Not care for poetry! Not an admirer of Browning! You have missed much, my young friend," murmured the customer. "I will take this copy," he went on, selecting an expensive one and handing Tom the money.

"I don't much care whether he buys poetry or books on sport as long as I sell 'em," thought the lad as he wrapped up the book. "Five dollars for a book! Whew! I work a week for that. But I'm glad I sold it to him."

The young man went out, fondly holding the volume of verse to his side. Tom went on arranging the booklets, but presently he had to stop to wait on a lady who wanted a fairy story for her little girl. Here Tom was more at home, and he found the lady quite ready to defer to his judgment as to what sort of a book was best.

Presently a young lady appealed to Tom to find for her a book on philosophy, and though the boy could hardly pronounce the title of it, he managed to locate it.

All that day Tom was kept busy, and he was acquiring more confidence in himself with every sale he made. At the close of the day, when Mr. Townsend looked over the slips made out by the different clerks, he congratulated Tom on the success he had had.

"I hope he keeps me after the holidays are over," thought our hero. "That's what I want, a good, steady job, so I can earn money, and then mother and Aunt Sallie won't have to work so hard."

Toward the end of that week Dr. Spidderkins paid another visit to the Emporium. He wandered in, and was soon examining volumes in that part of the shop given over to rare and costly books.

"Ah!" he exclaimed as Tom passed him on his way to get some wrapping-paper. "Here is just what I have been looking for. It is a rare old copy of Shakespeare. When did this come in? Why, bless my soul! If it isn't the boy who prevented me from carrying off books without paying for them the other day," he added as he recognized Tom. "How are you, young man?"

"Very well, sir."

"I must have this book," went on the old doctor.

"Let's see—it will just match that volume of Milton I bought the same day I got the copy of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. No, it wasn't, either. It was the day I bought Darwin's volume on evolution, or the day after. I declare, I can't remember which. But I must take this book along with me. What's the price?"

"Ten dollars," answered Tom, after a look at the mystic letters on the fly-leaf.

"Ah, very reasonable—very reasonable, indeed."

Tom thought it very unreasonable, for the book was an old one, and he knew of whole shelvesful of brand-new books at much lower prices than that. Dr. Spidderkins, however, seemed to think he had a bargain.

"I'll take it," he said, putting his hand in his pocket. Then a blank look came over his face. "Bless my soul, I've lost my pocketbook!" he exclaimed.

"Lost it?" repeated Tom. "Do you think you dropped it here?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Maybe I left it at home. I'm so forgetful."

"We have a telephone here—you could call up your house and ask if it's there," suggested Tom.

"So I could. I never thought of that. But I can't talk very well over the wire, and my sister-in-law can't hear me as well as she can some per-

sons. Suppose you call up for me? I'll give you the number. It's 2256 Back Bay."

"I'll call up for you," said Tom. "Shall I wrap up this book?"

"Yes. I'll take it, anyhow, and send Mr. Townsend the money. Queer I can't remember when I last had my pocketbook."

## CHAPTER IV

### STRANGE ACTIONS

THE experience Tom had once had, as a clerk in a grocery store, where he took orders over the telephone, had made him fairly expert in the use of the instrument. He soon got the aged doctor's house on the wire, and was inquiring of Mrs. Barton Sandow (which the physician gave as his sister-in-law's name) whether the pocketbook had been left there.

"Yes, it's here," answered Mrs. Sandow shortly. "He forgot it, as usual. Tell him he left it on the breakfast-table. Why, is he in trouble?"

"No; only he wants to buy some books, and he hasn't the money with him," answered Tom politely.

"Well, tell him to be sure and not forget to come home to dinner," said Mrs. Sandow, as she hung up the receiver with a click that snapped in Tom's ear.

"What does she say?" asked the old doctor.

"It's there," answered the boy. "And she wants

you to be sure not to forget to come home to dinner."

"I'll not. I'll start right away, and then I can't forget. But I must tell Mr. Townsend about this book. I remember once I took a volume without paying for it—let me see, it was the same day I picked up a rare copy of Bacon's works—and I forgot to send the money for a week, I got so interested reading it. I want him to send after the money for this, in case I don't forward it right away."

Tom found the book-store proprietor and told him of Dr. Spidderkin's desires.

"Tell him to take the book, and welcome," was the reply Mr. Townsend sent back. "He can take all the books he wants. He is good for them."

The doctor left, after insisting that a messenger must be sent to his house that evening for the ten dollars, in case he did not send it sooner.

"I guess you'd better stop up and see the doctor, Tom," said Mr. Townsend, when it came closing time. "He hasn't sent the money, and, while I know he'll pay it, he always likes to have things done just as he requests. I don't want to offend him. So just take a run up there. You know where the place is now."

"Yes, sir. Shall I bring back the money tonight?"

"No; fetch it with you in the morning. I sup-

pose you know that, beginning next week, we shall keep open quite late, on account of the Christmas trade?"

"Yes, sir. I don't mind."

"I'm glad you don't. The boy who had the place you now have left on account of that."

Tom made up his mind it would take a good deal more than that to make him give up his job.

He took a car for the Back Bay district, and arrived at the Spidderkins mansion about seven o'clock. His knock was answered by the woman he now knew to be Mrs. Sandow.

"Well?" she asked ungraciously.

"I called to see Dr. Spidderkins."

"What about?"

"I was told to collect ten dollars for some books."

"Oh! Those everlasting books!" exclaimed Mrs. Sandow. "My brother-in-law spends more money on them than he does on the house. It's all foolishness!"

She opened the door a little wider, and Tom took this for an invitation to enter.

"Are your feet clean?" she asked suspiciously.

"I wiped them carefully on the mat."

"I don't believe you half did. I never saw a boy yet with clean feet. Wait here, and I'll tell the doctor."

"Ah, good evening, my lad," exclaimed the

aged physician, as, with his spectacles half way down on his nose, and holding a book in each hand, he came out to greet Tom. "You are from the printer's, aren't you? Have you the proofs of my new book on 'The Influence of Environment in Nervous Diseases?"

"No, sir. I'm not from the printer's," said Tom. "I came about the ten dollars, for Mr. Townsend."

"Oh, yes, to be sure. How stupid of me. I wonder where my pocketbook is?"

"Didn't you find it?"

"Find it? Did I lose it?"

"Yes. Don't you remember me telephoning about it for you, when you were in the store?"

"Oh, yes, to be sure. Now I know who you are. Dear, dear, I am getting to have a bad memory, I'm afraid!"

He already had it, Tom thought, but the old gentleman was such a delightful character, that the boy could not help liking him.

"Come right into the sitting-room," went on the doctor. "Let me see, your name is Theopholus, isn't it?"

"No, sir, it's Tom Baldwin."

"Oh, yes, I recollect now. Well, Tom, just sit down a minute, and I'll get the money. Please don't disturb any of the books or papers. I'm writing another book on how to avoid taking colds,

and I'm looking up all the authorities about that form of disease."

The table was covered with books and papers, and Tom took a seat far enough away so that there would be no danger of disturbing them.

"Eliza, have you seen my pocketbook?" Dr. Spidderkins called, as he left the room.

"I put it right on top of your desk, where you couldn't help but see it," answered Mrs. Sandow.

"Oh, yes, of course; I remember now. I have it in my pocket."

The doctor came back into the sitting-room. He was followed a moment later by a tall, dark-complexioned man, whose eyes, as Tom noticed at a glance, seemed to be continually shifting about.

"Ah, Barton, are you going to sit here and read?" asked the doctor pleasantly.

"I was going to, but you've got your confounded papers all over the table, so I don't see how I can very well," answered the man, in surly tones.

"I'll make a place for you at once," said the doctor hastily, sweeping the papers to one side.

"You needn't bother," was the man's ungracious remark. "I can go somewhere else. I wish you wouldn't make such a muss."

"But this is about my new book."

"I don't care what it is."

The doctor seemed to shrink away from Mr. Barton Sandow, and Tom felt a natural resent-

ment againt a man who would speak so ungraciously to an aged person.

"Allow me to present a friend of mine to you," went on the physician courteously. "This is Tom Baldwin, Mr. Sandow. Tom, or I suppose I should say Thomas, this is my brother-in-law. That is he is a sort of brother-in-law. His wife was my brother's wife, but my brother has been dead several years, and his wife married again."

"You needn't go into the whole family history," said Barton Sandow surlily. "How are you?" he added to Tom, but his tone of voice was such that he might as well have told the boy he did not care whether he was well or ill.

"I—I wasn't going to," said the doctor gently. "I only thought—I—er—and—er—" he seemed to forget what he was going to say.

"Did you call on business?" asked Mr. Sandow suddenly, looking at Tom. "Dr. Spidderkins evidently has forgotten what it is about," he added with a sneer.

"I'm from Mr. Townsend's book store," was the boy's reply.

"That's it. I knew it was something about books," said the doctor with an uneasy laugh. "Thank you for reminding me. I had forgotten. I must pay you that ten dollars."

He drew out his pocketbook, and began fumb-

ling with it, for his eyesight was clearly not of the best.

"Ah, I thought I had a ten-dollar bill somewhere in it," he said, as he handed Tom an envelope. "I sealed it up in this, and meant to send it, but I forgot it. But there ought to be more money in my wallet. I left fifty dollars in it this morning, and now there are only fifteen. I wonder what has become of the rest?"

"Do you think I took it?" asked Mr. Sandow, almost savagely.

"Why—er—no—of course not," answered the old doctor, looking over the tops of his spectacles. "I only thought——"

"You don't know what you thought!" exclaimed the other quite fiercely. "First thing you know you'll be accusing me or my wife of stealing money from you. 'Liza, come here!" he called.

His wife stood in the door.

"What is it, Barton?" she asked.

"The doctor has missed some money from his pocketbook, and he accuses us of taking it."

"No, no! Nothing of the sort!" said the physician quickly. "I—I didn't mean that. I—I thought I had more money than I have. But—er—I must——"

"You spent it, and you've forgotten all about it," declared Mrs. Sandow with a hard laugh.

"You're always doing that, Lemuel. "Didn't you pay for two tons of coal this afternoon?"

"That's so, I guess I must have, but I don't recollect about it. Did any coal come?"

"Of course," answered Mrs. Sandow, quickly, and Tom, looking up suddenly, saw her making some kind of a motion to her husband.

"Then that must be where the money went," agreed the doctor. "I'm sorry I'm so forgetful. It may interfere with my new book. I don't mind the money, but I like to know where I spend it."

"Probably you wasted it on books," said Mr. Sandow, half growling out the words.

"No, I never waste money on books, and I only spent ten dollars for one to-day."

"Ten dollars for a book!" gasped Mrs. Sandow. "You'll be in the poorhouse soon, at that rate."

"It was a very rare volume," pleaded her brother-in-law. "I—I couldn't very well let it go."

"Humph!" sniffed the woman. "You'll wish you had that money some day. But it's time you went to bed. You're forgetting it's past your hour."

"Is it?" asked the doctor humbly. "I knew there was something I ought to remember. "Well, good-night, Tom—is it Tom? Oh, yes, I remember now. Perhaps you'll have some more books to deliver for me next week. I must get some

more authorities on colds," and the aged gentleman tottered off, shaking his white head, as though vainly trying to remember something.

"I guess that's all that need detain you," said Mr. Sandow rather roughly to Tom. "We close up early here."

"Yes; my business is finished," replied the boy.

As he went down the stone steps, our hero wondered at the queer actions of Mr. and Mrs. Sandow, for they seemed to have some strange control over the aged doctor.

## CHAPTER V

### CHARLEY GROVE'S IDEA

"HEY, Tom!" hailed a voice, as our hero got off the street car, near his home. "Where are you going?"

Tom turned, to behold his chum, Charley Grove, whom he had not seen since going to work in the book store.

"Going home," replied Tom. "Where are you going?"

"Same place. Haven't seen you in over a week. Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"I've got a new job," replied Tom.

"Where?"

"Down in Townsend's Book Emporium."

"What doin'? Readin' books?"

"Not much. Don't get any time for that. We're busy on account of the holidays. What are you doing?"

"Oh, I've got a new job, and it's fine."

"What at?"

"I run the telephone switchboard in a broker's

office. Short hours and good pay. I get ten a week. All I got was eight in my last place."

"That's what I got, before the firm failed. Now I only get five."

"You ought to strike for more money."

"Wouldn't do much good. I'm only an extra hand during the holidays. I'll be lucky if I stay there after the first of the year."

"That's too bad. You ought to learn to be a telephone boy. I know two or three who make more money than I do."

"Is it hard to learn?"

"Well, it isn't so very easy, and if you're in a busy office like mine it keeps you on the jump. It's no fun to have all three members of the firm trying to get connections at once, and half a dozen parties on the outside wanting to talk to the partners to give orders to sell or buy stocks. I couldn't do it at first, and I got all mixed up, but I can work it all right now."

"I'd like to have a place like that," said Tom. "I used to take orders over the telephone in the grocery store."

"Bein' on a private exchange is a heap different from that," said Charley, as he walked along beside Tom.

"Do you think there's a place in your office for another boy?" asked Tom, rather wistfully, as he thought of the good salary his chum was getting.

"I don't believe so. But I'll keep my ears open, and if I hear of anything in that line, I'll let you know."

"I wish you would. I'll have to look for something after Christmas, and I'm afraid I'll have a hard task finding anything."

"Where were you when I saw you getting off the car?" asked Charley.

"I'd been over in the Back Bay section, to collect some money from a Dr. Spidderkins."

"Dr. Spidderkins! Why he used to be our doctor," said Charley. "He's too old to practice now, but I remember my mother saying she had him for me, when I was a baby."

"He's rather a queer character," commented Tom. "He's always forgetting things."

"I wish I had his rocks! He's got slathers of money."

"He doesn't look rich. His clothes aren't very good, but maybe that's because he spends so much on books."

"Oh, he's got lots to spend," said the other boy. "I heard my dad say Dr. Spidderkins was worth close to half a million. But I guess he doesn't have much fun out of it."

"Why?"

"Well, he's always studying some queer subject or other, or writing books or papers for the scien-

tific magazines. And then I guess his sister-in-law doesn't treat him any too good."

"I believe you're right there," agreed Tom. "She seems to make fun of him, because he's so forgetful."

"From what I hear, though," went on Charley, "his short memory just suits Mr. Sandow—that's his sister-in-law's second husband."

"Suits him? How do you mean?"

"Well, I've got an idea," went on Tom's chum, "that Sandow would like to get control of part of Dr. Spidderkin's money. He's got slathers of it, as I said, and I don't believe he knows where it all is. He's as careless about cash as he is about other things, dad says. Forgets what he does with his rocks."

"How do you know Sandow would like to get hold of it," asked Tom.

"Well, Sandow does some business through our firm. Not much, though. He's a 'piker.' "

"What's a 'piker'?"

"That's what we call a chap that buys a few shares of stock at a time. Small business, you know. Well, Sandow does a little business with us, and I heard him telephoning to our junior partner one day, giving an order for a few shares. Mr. Fletcher, that's the junior partner, asked him why he didn't buy more, and I heard Sandow say he couldn't, as he didn't have the money. Then

I heard him laugh, sort of queer-like and he said he might have more soon. Mr. Fletcher asked him where he was going to get it, and Sandow said he expected to get it from a friend of the family. Mr. Fletcher asked him if he meant Dr. Spidderkins, and Sandow only laughed. That's all I heard."

"Can you hear what both people say over the wire?"

"Sure, when you cut in on the switchboard. I have to keep listening, to tell when they're finished, 'cause there's most always somebody waitin' for our wire."

"So you think Sandow is trying to get part of the old doctor's money?" asked Tom.

"That's my idea," replied Charley. "I guess it wouldn't be so hard, either, for the doctor's so forgetful he might have a hundred or five hundred dollars one minute, and not find it the next, and he wouldn't know what become of it."

There came at once to Tom's mind the scene he had witnessed that evening in the doctor's home —the confusion about the money, and the puzzled air of the physician—when he could not find it in his wallet.

"Well, this is my street," announced Charley, as he paused on a corner. "Come on over some night and see a fellow."

"I will, only I can't until after the holidays.

We're going to keep open evenings beginning next week."

"That's tough. You ought to be a telephone boy, and get done at three o'clock. I went to a moving picture show this afternoon."

"I wish I could go. But let me know if you hear of a chance for me, Charley."

"I will, Tom. Hope you keep your job."

"I don't know as I want to, since I've heard about yours," replied Tom with a laugh. "Good-night."

Tom hurried on to his home. As he reached the steps, and felt for the key of the door, he gave a sudden start. The envelope containing the ten dollars which Dr. Spidderkins had given him, and which he had put in his pocket, was gone!

## CHAPTER VI

### OUT OF WORK

THINKING he might not have looked in the right pocket, Tom made a hasty search through all the others.

"No use," he said dolefully, "it's gone! I must have dropped it after I left the house. What's to be done?"

The situation was serious for the lad. He wished he had been more careful, but he had been so engaged in thinking of the queer actions of Mr. and Mrs. Sandow, and in talking to Charley Grove, that he had given little thought to the money.

"Mr. Townsend will think I have stolen it, when I go to him in the morning, and say I've lost it," murmured Tom. "I wish I had been more particular. Maybe there was a hole in my pocket."

He looked, but there was none, for Mrs. Baldwin attended carefully to her son's clothes.

"This is certainly a pickle!" exclaimed the boy to himself softly. "I wonder what I'd better do? Maybe if I go back the way I came I'll find the

envelope lying in the street. It was a good-sized, white one, and I can easily see it."

"But maybe I dropped it in the car," he added. "No, I don't believe I could have done that, or some of the passengers or the conductor would have seen it on the floor, and told me about it. I must have lost it either before I got on the car, or afterward. I'll walk back to where I met Charley, and see if it's there."

It was nearly eleven o'clock now, and as Tom looked up at the silent little house, where his mother and aunt were doubtless sleeping, he wondered if he had better go in and tell his parent about the loss, and inform her that he was going to look for the money.

"No, I'll not do that," he decided. "She'll only worry about it, and she has troubles enough. I'll hurry as much as I can, and get back as soon as possible. Still, if I'm not in by midnight she may worry too. But then I told her I was likely to be late any night now, for I might have to deliver books in the suburbs. I guess she won't worry if I don't go in right away."

Deciding that this was the best plan, Tom descended the steps of his home, and hurried back over the route he had taken from the car. How eagerly he scanned the pavement, looking for that white, square envelope! Every scrap of paper he

saw made his heart flutter, until he came close to it, and saw that it was not what he sought.

"Well, here's where I took the car," he said, as he reached the corner where he had alighted. "Either I didn't drop it along this way, or if I did, some one has picked it up. Now for the second part of my search."

He waited for a car to come along, to take him back to Dr. Spidderkins's house, and it was a cold, lonesome wait for Tom, who felt quite miserable over what had happened. To his delight he saw on the car the same conductor with whom he had ridden about an hour before. The man was on the return trip.

"Did you find an envelope in the car, after I left?" asked Tom eagerly, as he got aboard, and told the circumstances.

"Didn't find anything but an old lunch box, and there was nothing in it," said the conductor.

"Then I must have dropped it before I got on the car," decided Tom.

Arriving at the place where he had first boarded the electric vehicle, he alighted and hurried over the ground toward the house of the eccentric doctor. No sign of a white envelope greeted his anxious eyes.

"I'm going to ask if it's in the house," the boy said to himself, as he stood in front of the big, dark mansion. "I might have let it slip when I

thought I put it in my pocket, and perhaps they picked it up on the floor. Though if Mr. and Mrs. Sandow did, they're likely to keep it, if what Charley Grove says is true."

Tom rang the bell. It seemed like a quarter of an hour before some one opened a window over his head and called:

"Well, what's the matter? Is it a telegram?"

"I'm from Townsend's book store," replied Tom. "I came——"

"What! More books!" exclaimed a voice Tom recognized as Mrs. Sandow's. "You can't leave 'em here to-night. Everybody's to bed long ago. You'll have to come back in the morning."

"I haven't got any books," said Tom. "I dropped the envelope with the ten-dollar bill the doctor gave me, and I thought maybe it might be in the house. Would you mind looking?"

"That's a likely story!" sneered Mr. Sandow, joining his wife at the window. "You probably stole that money, and now you want us to help you lie about it. Clear out of here!"

"I didn't steal the money!" exclaimed Tom. "I lost it! Will you please look down in the sitting-room, or have Dr. Spidderkins do so?"

"The doctor's asleep, and I'm not going to disturb him," declared Mrs. Sandow.

"I guess not!" added her husband. "Now clear out of here, and don't disturb us any more. You're

a nuisance, with your books and things! I'll put a stop to this buying of trash!"

"What's the matter? What is it? Is it a burglar after my rare books?" inquired Dr. Spidderkins, coming suddenly to the window, behind Mr. and Mrs. Sandow. He leaned out, and Tom could see, in the light of an electric arc lamp in front of the house, that the doctor was dressed, and had on his spectacles, as if he had been sitting up reading.

"Go back to bed!" called the woman.

"I haven't been to bed. I must have forgotten to go," answered the doctor. "I was reading an account of how the Romans invaded England. It's in a very rare first edition of——"

The rest of the sentence was cut off, as Mr. Sandow slammed the window down.

"They don't want him to speak to me," thought Tom. "I wonder what's the matter with that couple? They seem to want the doctor to do just as they say."

An instant later the window was raised again, and the aged physician looked out.

"Did you say some one was stealing my books?" he asked. "Are you a policeman? I'm much obliged to you. I hope the fellow didn't get my first folio Shakespeare."

"No, I'm not a policeman! No books have been

stolen!" cried Tom. "I'm from Townsend's book store."

"Oh, yes. You're Theopholus—no—I remember now; you're Tom Baldwin. Wait; I'll be right down. Have you some more books for me?"

Before the boy could answer, the window was shut again, but in less than a minute the front door opened, and Dr. Spidderkins, holding a candle in his hand, for he liked that old-fashioned method of going about the house after dark, was inviting Tom to enter. The story of the mishap was soon told.

"I thought maybe I might have dropped the envelope here," the boy finished.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Dr. Spidderkins, as he reached for his pocketbook. He searched hurriedly through it. Then he uttered an exclamation. "There! It's all my fault. I knew I'd forget about it!"

"What?" asked Tom hopefully.

"Why, I gave you the wrong thing! There wasn't any ten-dollar bill in that envelope!"

"There wasn't?" and Tom's heart grew light again.

"No. That envelope contained a list of books I wanted Mr. Townsend to get for me. I meant to send it back to him by whoever called for the ten dollars. I put the envelope in the compartment with the bill, so I would remember about it.

"Why, I gave you the wrong thing!" said Dr. Spidderkins.
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Then my memory played me a trick, and I gave you the envelope with the list, and not the bill. So you haven't lost much of anything, after all. I can easily make out another list, and here is the ten-dollar bill. Queer how that happened."

"I guess it's a good thing you didn't give me the money," said Tom with a smile, "for I would have lost it. But I'll be careful this time."

He placed the bill in an inner pocket, and then, bidding the doctor good-night, Tom once more started for home. This time he reached it in safety, and he put the bill under his pillow when he went to bed. He said nothing about the little adventure to his mother or aunt, merely stating that he had been out late because of some business for his employer. Nor did he mention the happening to Mr. Townsend.

The work at the book store became more exacting as Christmas approached, and as customers increased, Tom was kept busy from morning to night. He had to run on many errands, and he learned more of Boston than he had ever known before.

He made many sales in the store, and several times he waited on Dr. Spidderkins, but the physician made no reference to Tom's midnight visit. Probably he forgot all about it ten minutes after it occurred.

Christmas eve Tom was up until after midnight,

delivering books to late customers, and when he got back to the store about one o'clock in the morning, he found Mr. Townsend about to close up.

"Tom," said his employer, "you've done very good work for me, and I assure you I appreciate it. We don't open to-morrow, and here's a little remembrance for the Christmas season."

He handed our hero a book of adventures that Tom had long desired to possess.

"I am sorry," went on Mr. Townsend, "that I won't be able to keep you after this week. You know I engaged you for the holiday rush, and that's over now, so I won't need so many clerks. I am sorry to have to let you go, as you suited me very well."

"I'm sorry, too," said Tom frankly, "but, of course, I understood when you hired me that it was for the holiday season. I only hoped you could keep me."

"So did I, but I find I can not. Your week will not be up until Saturday, but as there will be little to do, you need not come in that day, nor Friday, though I will pay you for a full week. Here is the money. Now if you want a reference, to get another position, call on me. I will be glad to speak a good word for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Townsend."

"I think you can get work, somewhere," went

on the bookseller. "I wish I could keep you, but I can't. Times are too dull. Good-night, Tom."

Tom went home with a heavy heart, in spite of the fact that it was Christmas morning, and that a book had been presented to him. He was out of work, and he did not know where to look for a situation.

## CAPTER VII

### LOOKING FOR A SITUATION

"MERRY CHRISTMAS!" called Mrs. Baldwin, as she knocked on Tom's door that morning. "Merry Christmas, Tom!"

"Merry Christmas, mother!" he answered. He hurriedly dressed, trying to keep up a cheerful spirit, but it was hard work. He went downstairs, and handed to his mother and aunt each a pretty little booklet, which he had purchased at the Emporium at reduced prices.

"Oh, Tom!" exclaimed his mother, "why didn't you save your money? I haven't been able to get anything for you except some new socks. You needed them very much."

"Indeed I did, mother, and I couldn't have anything better," answered the boy, giving his mother a hug and a kiss.

"Here is a pair of woolen gloves I knitted for you," put in his aunt. "I'm sure they're not as nice as this Christmas book."

"They're a good deal more useful," replied

Tom. "Why, this is a pretty good Christmas, after all, even if I have lost my job," he said, deciding this was a good time to break the unpleasant news.

"Lost your job, Tom!" exclaimed Mrs. Baldwin.

"Mercy sakes! Lost—your—job!" added his aunt.

"Well, I sort of expected it," the youth answered ruefully, and he told how it had come about.

"I rather hoped he might keep you on after the holidays," remarked Mrs. Baldwin.

"So did I," said her son, "but, never mind, I'll get a place somewhere. Things are sure to be lively after the first of the year, and that's only a week off."

"Oh, we'll manage to get along, somehow," declared Mrs. Baldwin slowly. She did not want Tom to know how little money she had, nor what a little sewing there was in prospect for her and her sister.

But in spite of these drawbacks it was quite a merry little Christmas for Tom and his relatives, even though they had beef instead of turkey, and no dessert at all.

Tom started off, early the next morning, to look for work, but he found the Christmas spirit rather a detriment than otherwise, for many places took

advantage of the holidays and paid little attention to business. The lad tramped the streets in vain, and came home that night, tired and discouraged.

He awoke in the morning to find a foot of snow on the ground, and more coming down.

"Here's my work all cut out for me," he said gleefully. "Mother's socks and Aunt Sallie's gloves will just come in handy to-day. I'll turn snow-shoveler."

After he had cleaned the sidewalk in front of his own house, he shouldered the shovel and broom, and joined the army of men and boys that had begun to gather to clear away the frozen crystals that were still lazily floating down.

Whether the Christmas spirit induced householders to be more liberal than usual, or whether Tom worked extra hard he did not stop to consider, but the fact was he earned three dollars that day.

"This is better than working in a book store," he said gleefully, as he gave his mother a handful of change that night. "I'd like this regular, I would."

"But being in a book store is so educational and refining, Tom," remarked his aunt.

"Shoveling snow buys more bread and butter," answered the matter-of-fact boy with a laugh.

He resumed his search for work the next day, as there was no more snow to shovel, but every-

where he applied he met with the reply that there was nothing for him to do. All business seemed to have taken a sudden drop after Christmas.

"It will be better after New Year's," decided Tom. "I'll sure get a job then."

Anxiously he waited for January the second. He started off early that morning, taking some lunch with him, as he found he could get scarcely anything to eat in a restaurant for the money he could afford to pay. He bought a paper, and turned to the column "Help Wanted."

"Let's see what firm offers boys the highest wages," he said. "That's what I'm looking for."

He saw several advertisements that seemed to offer a good chance, but Tom was at this disadvantage—he had to walk to the places, for he could not afford car fare. In this way he arrived too late in a number of cases, the positions having been filled just before he presented himself.

"I must pick out the places that are nearest by," he decided, and he went over the list again. He selected an advertisement of a firm on Tremont Street, that wanted a boy to assist in packing. Tom found it was a big crockery store.

"Have you had any experience in packing?" asked the manager, to whom, after inquiring of several clerks, he was referred.

"We moved once, and I helped them," said

Tom, wondering what sort of packing was done in the place.

"No, I'm afraid that would hardly do," was the answer. "We want a boy who has had experience in packing dishes."

"I think I could learn," spoke the boy eagerly.

"I'm afraid we couldn't risk it. Our dishes are very valuable, and if a boy broke one or two it would amount to more than his wages. We require experienced help."

"Couldn't I learn by beginning to pack heavy dishes, that wouldn't break so easily, if I happened to drop one?" asked Tom.

"No, I'm afraid not."

Tom wondered how a boy was ever going to get experience packing fine dishes, if he never had any practice on heavy ones, but he did not think it would do any good to ask the manager, so he left.

At the next place a boy was wanted to run errands, but as the wages were only two dollars a week, Tom knew he could not afford to take it, for he would hardly make his expenses. Then he saw an advertisement of a boy wanted in a machine shop.

"That might do," he mused. "I'm fond of machinery, and I often used to go to the shop where father worked."

"We want a boy to learn the trade," said the foreman of the shop where Tom applied, and

where the machinery made so much noise that every one had to shout to be heard. "It's a good trade, and you can earn good wages at it."

"How much do you pay?" asked Tom.

"Pay? We don't pay anything the first year," answered the foreman, in apparent surprise at the question. "I thought you wanted to learn the trade."

"I'd like to," said Tom, "but I want to live while I'm learning it. A trade wouldn't do me much good if I starved to death, and I'd do that if I didn't get some money."

"I guess you won't suit," was the comment, as the foreman turned back to the lathe which he had stopped while he talked to Tom.

"No, I guess not," was our hero's comment.

He had exhausted the possibilities of the advertising list, so he strolled around in the streets where there were many office buildings, hoping he might see some boys he knew, who could tell him where he might apply for work, or where he might see that magical sign "Boy Wanted" hanging in front of a store or office.

He did see two signs, but the places were meant for smaller lads than Tom—boys who had parents to support them—and who would be content with two or three dollars a week.

"I guess this is going to be a poor year for boys," thought Tom, as he went over to a little

park, where, sitting on a bench, he ate his lunch. He spent five cents for a cup of coffee and a bun at a street stand, and felt somewhat better after it, for the day was cold.

"There's a big building," mused the boy, as he looked at one just across from the little park. "There must be a couple of hundred offices in it. Now they need boys in an office, and out of the two hundred there ought to be a place for me. I'm going to ask in every office in that building."

Tom did not know how much of a task he had set for himself, but he started bravely in, beginning on the ground floor, and working his way up.

In some places he was politely told that there was no opening for him. In others he was gruffly given the same information, though, by this time, he was getting hardened to rebuffs.

"Well, I've asked in twenty-five places," he mused. "Here goes for the twenty-sixth."

He entered an office marked "Real Estate and Insurance." A rather pretty girl was pounding away at a typewriter.

"Do you want a boy?" asked Tom, smiling, in spite of his weariness.

"Do I want a boy?" she asked wonderingly. "Why, no. Are you a messenger boy? I didn't ring for any."

"I'm looking for work," explained Tom.

"Oh, I see," she answered kindly. "I don't know. I'll ask——"

At that moment a man came from an inner office. Tom started at the sight of him, for he was Barton Sandow, the brother-in-law of Dr. Spidderkins.

"Well," fairly growled Mr. Sandow, "what do you want here? I don't want any books, even if Dr. Spidderkins does waste his money on them."

"I haven't any books," replied Tom. "I called to see if you wanted a boy. I'm looking for work."

The lad's answer seemed to enrage the man. He started toward our hero, his face flaming red with passion.

"Who told you to come here?" he cried.

"No one; I just happened to come. I'm inquiring in all the offices in the building."

"Well, you clear out of here, you young gutter-pup!" fairly shouted Barton Sandow. "I don't want a boy, and if I did I shouldn't hire you! Get out of here! Do you understand! Clear out, and don't you dare come in again!"

The pretty typewriter girl shrank back afrightened, and Tom, not knowing what to make of the outburst, opened the door and went out.

"There's something wrong with Mr. Sandow," he said, for the needlessly cruel words rankled in

his mind. "There was no occasion for him to speak like that. I pity Dr. Spidderkins, living with that man. There's something queer about it. I wonder what it is?"

## CHAPTER VIII

### DR. SPIDDERKINS' POCKETBOOK

TOM tried to keep up a cheerful spirit when he went home that night, tired and discouraged with his fruitless search for work.

"No luck, Tom?" asked his mother, who, in spite of his efforts at concealment, could almost read his thoughts.

"No, but I'll find a place to-morrow, mother. Is there any work I can take home for you?"

"Yes; here is a skirt I have just finished for Mrs. Wellderly, the minister's wife. She is usually good pay, and I have written her a little note, asking to please send the money by you."

"I wish I was earning money for you, mother."

"Never mind, Tom. I have had an unusual lot of sewing to do lately, and we are making out fairly well. Now here is the skirt. Carry it carefully."

She handed the bundle to Tom, who grasped it as if it was a package of books, placing it under one arm.

"Mercy! Goodness sakes alike! Don't do that!" cried his aunt.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom innocently. "Am I spilling any of the fol-de-rols?"

"No; but you'll crush the ruffle all out of shape!" explained his mother. "Hold it this way, Tom," and she showed him how he ought to carry the parcel.

Tom safely delivered his mother's work, and received the money from the minister's wife.

"Tell your mother to call and see me," the lady said to the boy. "A friend of mine wants some fine sewing done, and I think she would like Mrs. Baldwin's work."

"I will," promised Tom.

Refreshed by a good night's sleep, though he was awake a little longer than usual, wondering what the day would bring forth, Tom arose early the next morning, determined to leave no chance untried to get a place to work. He looked over the advertisements in the paper, and picked out several.

He found, to his regret, however, that in most of the places where boys or young men were wanted, that experience in some line of industry was necessary. This was particularly true of the shops and stores. In the offices this was not quite so requisite, but office positions were very scarce.

"I think I'll try some of the book stores,"

thought Tom, when noon came, and he had had no success. "I had a little experience there, and it ought to be worth something. Any way," he added, as he smiled at the recollection, "I know there are two Brownings, a poet and a baseball player."

He turned into Milk Street, where was located Townsend's Emporium, but he knew it was no use to apply there. He recalled that there was a second-hand book store, further down the street, and he decided to try his luck there.

It was quite a different place from the neatly-kept shop where he had formerly worked, and there was a curious, musty smell about it, many old volumes being ranged about on the shelves.

"Do you want a boy?" asked Tom, of the proprietor.

"Why? Did you see a sign out in front?" inquired the man.

"A sign? No. Why?"

"Well, sometimes the boys of the neighborhood hang a sign out in front to annoy me. They know I never hire a boy. They do it for a joke, and several lads, in need of work, have been fooled by it."

"I don't think that's a very good joke," remarked Tom.

"Neither do I," agreed the proprietor. "No, I don't want a boy, but I'm glad there's no foolish

sign out in front. How did you come to ask in here?"

"Well, I used to be in Townsend's store, and as I need work, and every place seems to be one where experience is needed, I thought I'd try a book store."

"I'm sorry," went on the man more kindly. "I can't afford to keep a helper. There's very little profit in second-hand books, and to hire a boy would eat it all up. I need a boy quite often to deliver books, but I can't afford to hire one regularly."

"How often do you need one?"

"Well, about once a day. In fact I wish I had one now to take some books to a man who lives three miles from here. I'll give you fifty cents and your car fare if you'll deliver them."

"I'll do it," said Tom, glad of the chance to earn a half dollar.

"Wait a minute, and I'll wrap them up."

Tom was soon ready to start, carrying quite a heavy bundle of books. As he passed out of the store, in front of which were two big tables, with bargains in second-hand books on them, he saw a familiar figure reading a tattered volume.

"How do you do, Dr. Spidderkins!" greeted Tom, as he recognized the aged physician.

"Eh? What's that? Oh, it's—I've forgotten

—no—I remember now, you're William Henderson, aren't you?"

"No, sir; I'm Thomas Baldwin."

"Oh, yes. You're in the Emporium. I remember now. My memory must be coming back."

"I used to be there," replied Tom, "but there was no work for me after the holidays. I'm doing odd jobs. Just now I'm carrying books for the man who owns this place."

"Ah, that's a fine job, carrying books," commented the old gentleman. "You are diffusing knowledge, my young friend. A very noble calling. Now I can only read books, I can't carry them about any more. I am reading a very fine book now. It seems to be quite rare. It tells how the ancient Greeks had the primitive idea of raising chickens by means of hot water pipes—something on the order of our modern incubators. It's a very valuable book. I don't recollect when I have found one more valuable, of its kind. Yes, once; the same day I discovered a copy of Milton's Paradise Lost, in an old book store, I came across one worth almost as much as this. That was—um—er—dear me—I'm afraid I can't recall what it was. But I'll recollect it shortly. I must purchase this book before I forget it."

Tom watched the old gentleman start into the store, reading on the way the book in which he was so interested. Then Tom saw something else.

Dr. Spidderkins' pocketbook—an old-fashioned wallet—was half-way out of his pocket, and likely to drop to the sidewalk.

Our hero sprang forward to reach the wallet before it should fall. He grasped it, and was pulling it from the doctor's pocket, intending to restore it to him, when he was startled to hear a voice exclaim:

"Ah! You young rascal, I caught you in the very act!"

Tom turned, with the pocketbook in his hand, to behold Barton Sandow confronting him.

"What do you mean?" asked the boy.

"What do I mean? You'll soon see what I mean? Trying to steal the doctor's wallet, eh? I'll have you arrested!"

"I wasn't trying to steal it!" declared Tom, indignantly. "It was falling out of his pocket, and I caught it to give it back to him."

"That's a likely story! You're a thief; that's what you are!"

"What's that? What's the matter?" asked the aged physician, suddenly turning, as he became aware that something unusual had happened.

"This boy from the book store has just stolen your pocketbook!" said Mr. Sandow. "He's got it in his hand now."

"My pocketbook! Bless my soul! So it is; and I have a hundred dollars in it!"

"I didn't steal it!" cried Tom again. "It was dropping out, and I caught it!"

"Hold him, doctor, until I get an officer!" called Mr. Sandow, as he looked down the street, and saw a policeman approaching. "We'll soon have him behind the bars!"

## CHAPTER IX

### TOM LEARNS SOMETHING

Poor Tom was much distressed. What he meant to be an act calculated to benefit the old doctor, was likely to turn to his disadvantage, for he could not but admit that appearances were against him. It did look, to a casual observer, as though he had taken the pocketbook and was about to run away with it.

"This boy a thief?" exclaimed Dr. Lemuel Spidderkins as he looked at Tom. "I don't believe it! He's the boy who brought me the books. He's an honest lad if ever I saw one."

"Well, your eyesight isn't very good," remarked Mr. Sandow sneeringly. "I saw him steal the pocketbook."

"Oh, it's my pocketbook you're talking about, is it?" asked the doctor.

"Certainly. What did you think we were speaking about?" asked his brother-in-law.

"Why, I thought you meant one of these books. Bless my soul, that is my pocketbook. I forgot

about it for the moment, I was thinking so much about this book."

Tom did not know what to make of the aged man. Certainly his memory was very short, for in one breath he talked of his wallet, and the next he forgot he had mentioned it.

"Better look and see if he took any of the money out," suggested Mr. Sandow. "The policeman will be here in a minute."

"I didn't take any money!" insisted Tom.

The aged physician opened the wallet and examined it.

"Well, if this isn't a queer thing!" he exclaimed. "I meant to put a hundred dollars in it this morning, to buy a rare copy of Gibbon's Rome, but I forgot it. I haven't a cent with me. You'll have to lend me some, Barton."

"Are you sure you didn't give the hundred dollars away?" remarked Mr. Spidderkins' relative with a sneer.

"No; I'm sure I left it home. I put it in back of the first edition of Bacon's Essays. I remember now. My pocketbook hasn't a cent in it, so if any one had taken it, he wouldn't have stolen anything."

Tom looked relieved. Still, he wanted to be cleared of the least suspicion, and he did not know how this was going to be brought about. Unexpectedly, however, matters turned out right.

Quite a crowd had collected by this time, and a policeman was edging his way through it.

"What's the matter?" asked several. "Anybody killed?" was another inquiry.

"This boy tried to steal Dr. Spidderkins' pocketbook," declared Mr. Sandow.

"I did not!" indignantly denied Tom, and he explained what had really happened.

"I believe the boy's right," declared a middle-aged man in the throng.

"What do you know about it?" asked Mr. Sandow roughly.

"I was walking right behind this old gentleman," was the reply, and the man indicated the physician. "I saw his pocketbook partly out of his pocket, and I was just going to tell him to look out for it, when he turned into the book store. Then I thought if it fell out he would hear it drop, and pick it up, and I passed on. When I saw the crowd collecting I turned back."

"Ah, I told you this boy was not a thief!" exclaimed Dr. Spidderkins.

"You don't know whether he is or not," muttered Barton Sandow.

"Do you want to make a charge?" asked the policeman, turning to the aged physician.

"Indeed I do not, officer. I know this boy to be honest. He used to bring me books from Mr.

Townsend's store, and I am a good judge of character."

"All right," agreed the bluecoat. "You're the person most interested, and you ought to know what you want to do. Now then, move on, you people," he said to the crowd which was growing larger. "It's all over. No arrest is going to be made."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir," said Tom to the man who had testified in his favor. "And to you, Dr. Spidderkins, for believing in me."

"Oh, that's all right," answered the middle-aged man. "I'm glad I could do you a good turn."

The crowd began to disperse, and Mr. Sandow, with a spiteful look at Tom, hurried off up the street.

"He acts as though he had a grudge against me," thought Tom. "I wonder why?"

"There!" exclaimed Dr. Spidderkins, "my brother-in-law has gone off, without giving me a cent of money, and I want to buy this book. What shall I do? Oh, my memory is getting something very bad! I shall have to get a secretary."

"I'd lend the money to you, only I haven't any," said Tom. "I'm to get fifty cents for delivering this bundle, but I won't have that until I return."

"I'll take the will for the deed," replied the old doctor, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Perhaps the bookseller will trust me, or hold the book for me."

The proprietor of the store, who had been in the rear, and had not noticed the commotion in front of his place, now came out as he saw a possible customer. He at once recognized Dr. Spidderkins, who was a well-known character in the book stores of the entire city. The man at once agreed to let the physician take the book home, and pay for it when he liked. He even loaned him some money for car fare, since the first five cents he had paid a conductor, on leaving home, had been all the cash available.

Now that everything was satisfactorily adjusted Tom hurried off with the books. He delivered them safely, received his money, and arranged to call the following day, to see if there were any errands he might do. As he was starting toward home, for it was so late that he did not believe it worth while to look any farther for work that day, he was hailed by Charley Grove.

"Hello, Tom," called his chum. "I thought you were comin' over and see a fellow."

"I meant to, some evening, Charley, but I had to work late around Christmas time, and since then I've been looking for a place, and I haven't had much time."

"What's the matter; did you get discharged?"

"Not exactly, but there was no more work for me after the holidays."

"I see," declared Charley shortly. "Why don't you learn to be a telephone boy?"

"Wish I might; but where could I? Every place I go they want experienced help, but how's a fellow ever to get any experience if he never has a chance to learn?"

"That's so. Maybe I could teach you something about it. Our office closes early, and there'd be plenty of chances to learn."

"I wish you would."

"I'll speak to the boss about it to-morrow, and let you know. I stand in pretty good with him."

The next evening Charley left word at Tom's house (for our hero was absent, delivering some books for the second-hand dealer) that the broker had consented to allow Tom to learn how to operate a small private exchange switchboard.

When Tom got home, later that evening, he went over to Charley's house, and they completed the arrangements. The following afternoon Tom presented himself at the broker's office. Business was over for the day, and save for two bookkeepers and Charley, the place was deserted.

Thereupon, Charley initiated Tom into the mysteries of the plugs, the weighted cords, the switches, cams and the push buttons that constitute a private exchange.

"Do you think it will take me long to learn it?" asked Tom, as he made imaginary connections.

"No. A week or so, and then you can get a good job. I learned in a week. Wait now, and we'll practice. I'll make believe I'm the boss."

# CHAPTER X

## GETTING A PLACE

CHARLEY went into one of the inner offices, where there was a telephone connected with the switchboard.

"Now when you see that little black thing drop," he called to Tom, "you want to take up one of these plugs, which are attached to wires, though they call 'em cords, and plug it into the hole under where the black thing drops."

"What's that black thing?" asked Tom.

"That's the visual signal. There's a buzzer that goes with it, but I cut the buzzer out, because it makes my head ache," answered Charley, who was rather free and easy in his manners and talk. "Then," he went on, "you want to take off the receiver, 'cause there ain't no head and ear piece here, and listen to get the number. When I tell you a number you want to repeat it to central. And say, don't let them central girls bluff you. Some of 'em are too tart. Think you understand now? If you do I'll try you out."

"Go ahead," answered Tom, and Charley closed the door.

Presently the "little black thing" dropped. Tom pulled up a plug and inserted it into the proper hole.

"Get me one-eight-two-seven, Oxford," called Charley over the wire. Tom repeated the number to the central girl.

In a moment he heard the girl's voice over the wire:

"One-eight-two-seven, Oxford, doesn't answer."

"Aw, what ye givin' us!" exclaimed Charley, "cutting" into the conversation. "Ring 'em again, Flossie."

"I'll give you the manager," came the girl's voice over the wire again, and there was a frigid tone in it.

"Say, she must be a new one on this circuit," remarked Charley to Tom through the instrument. "The regular girl don't care if you have a little joke with her. Guess I'd better go slow. Listen now."

Soon a man's voice was heard asking what was wanted, and Charley, talking back to him said he was sure there must be some one in at the number he called.

"The operator will try again for you," said the manager.

Soon Tom heard a voice he recognized as that of a boy asking:

"What's the matter? What ye ringin' that way fer?"

"Hello, Pete!" called Charley. "That you?"

"Sure. This you, Charley?"

"Of course. Say, ain't you stayin' kinder late?"

"Yep. The boss went off, an' left me a lot of letters to copy. What you doin' in your office?"

"Oh, I'm teachin' a friend of mine how to run the switchboard. Let me introduce you to him. Hey, Tom Baldwin, that's my friend, Pete Lansing, on the other end of the wire."

"Glad to meet you," answered Tom, thinking this was a novel form of introduction.

"Same to you. Keep the change!" exclaimed Pete with a laugh. He seemed to be the same jolly sort of a lad Charley was. "Call me up again. I've got to get these letters done to put in the mail," he added.

"So long!" called Charley.

"Good-by," supplemented Tom, and then a click in the receiver told that Pete had disconnected.

"See how it's done?" asked Charley, coming from the inner room.

"A little," answered Tom.

"Now it's different when some one calls up, and wants a member of the firm," went on his

mentor. "If central would only ring up I'd show——"

Just then one of the black signals fell.

"Here comes a call now," said Charley. "It's just in time. Here, you take up a plug from right under the drop, and you jab it in the hole. Then you throw this little cam or handle down, and you ask 'em who they want. Go ahead now."

Tom listened, and heard a distant voice asking if this was the brokerage firm in whose office the boys were.

"Yes," replied Tom.

"Is Mr. Simpson in?" the voice asked.

"He wants Mr. Simpson," whispered Tom to Charley.

"Tell him he's gone for the day," was the telephone boy's answer. "Ask him if he wants to leave any message. If he does I'd better take it."

Tom did as he was told, but the man on the other end of the wire said he would call up in the morning.

"Pull out the plug," directed Charley, when the drop fell once more. "He's done. Now, if he had wanted one of the partners, all you'd have to do would be to take up the other cord, plug it into the hole connected with the particular 'phone on that's wanted, and punch the button opposite the hole. That rings a bell in whatever office is wanted. See how easy it is?"

"I don't think it's very easy," remarked Tom, "but maybe I'll learn it after a while."

"Of course you will. Come on, now, we'll practice some more."

Which the two boys did, for an hour longer, Charley giving Tom actual practice calling up newspaper offices to ask about certain events.

"The newspaper fellows are all right," declared Charley. "They'll tell you anything they can, and never kick, 'cause they know people are liable to give 'em tips on stories. And you want to be awful polite to customers that call up, 'cause they might report you if you wasn't. But don't let them central girls jolly you. Sometimes they'll keep you waiting five minutes for a number. Just tell 'em what you want, an' say you want it quick."

"I guess I could get along," answered Tom, "if I only had a place to get along in. I mean a job like yours."

"Oh, you'll git it in time," declared Charley confidently.

As it was getting close toward six o'clock, when the office building in which Charley worked was to be closed for the night, the boys left, Tom arranging to come as often as he could to take lessons on how to manipulate a switchboard.

During the next two weeks he had frequent occasion to take advantage of Charley's tutoring, for, search as he did, Tom could find no perman-

ent position. He had several places for a day or so at a time, and managed to earn a little money running errands for the second-hand book dealer, but he did not make much more than his expenses.

Had it not been that Mrs. Baldwin and her sister had plenty of sewing to do, the little family would have been sorely pressed for money.

"It's discouraging; isn't it, Tom?" said his mother one night, when he had come home from a hard day tramping about.

"Well, I'm getting sort of hardened to it," was his plucky answer. "Maybe I'll get a job to-morrow, mother."

He had said that every night for the past two weeks.

But the next day something happened. While Tom was at his breakfast the door bell rang, and, answering it, the while wondering who the early caller could be, Tom saw Charley Grove.

"Hello, Tom," greeted his chum. "Had your breakfast? Come on, hurry up."

"What's the matter? A fire?"

"I've got a chance to get you a job."

"A job? Where?"

"In a lawyer's office. I've been keeping watch of the ads. in the paper, and this mornin' there's one in for a boy in the same building where I am. A big firm of lawyers want a boy to manage their

private telephone exchange. Hurry up down and get it."

"Maybe they want someone who is more experienced than I am."

"What? With me t' recommend you?" asked Charley incredulously. "Aw, come on. Hurry up!"

Filled with delightful anticipations Tom hurried. Charley took him to the office in question, which was on the tenth floor of a big building on Washington Street. Early as it was there were several boys in the corridor, waiting for the place to open.

"We're too late," said Tom.

"You've got as good a show as any of 'em. You'll git a chance t' see one of the lawyers, and when you do, jest up and tell him you was my assistant. They know it takes a good boy to work a board in a broker's office."

"But I wasn't your assistant."

"Well, tell 'em I taught you. That'll do."

Charley had to leave Tom, to go to his own duties, and a little later, the offices of the law firm were opened. The boys were admitted in turn, and at last it came Tom's chance.

Luckily he kept his head, and answered the questions the lawyer asked him so intelligently, and told so frankly just what had been his telephone

exchange experience, that the lawyer remarked encouragingly:

"I believe you'll do."

Tom's heart gave a bound. Fortunately he had several good letters of recommendation, and, after a few more details had been settled, our hero found himself engaged to take charge of the switchboard in the private exchange of the big law firm, the boy who had previously managed it having been discharged for incompetency.

"Won't mother be glad!" exclaimed Tom, and he wished he could hurry home and tell her, but as the firm needed an operator at once, Tom had to start right in. At last he had what he felt was a good position.

## CHAPTER XI

### TOM MAKES A DISCOVERY

BUT if our hero imagined that working a telephone switchboard in the office of a big law firm was going to be as easy as it was to practice with his chum, Tom was grievously disappointed. Soon after he took his seat in front of the board, with its maze of cords, plugs, holes, cams and push buttons, he had a call for one of the partners. There were three members of the firm, which was known officially as Boise, Keen & Cutler. Mr. Boise was the senior member and Elias Cutler the junior.

It was Mr. Keen, a pleasant middle-aged man, who had hired Tom, and he showed the boy how to make the connections to the telephones in the offices of various members of the firm. There were also three clerks, each one of whom had an instrument.

At first, as it was early morning, only a few calls came in, and these Tom easily managed. The lawyers only had occasion to call up outside

parties once or twice, and Tom had no difficulty in getting the desired numbers. But, as the day advanced, and more business began to come in on the wire, the boy soon found he had his hands full.

"I guess it isn't going to be as easy as I thought," he said to himself, as he placed plug after plug in the holes, and worked the cams and buttons as fast as he could.

About noon some one called for Mr. Boise, and Tom put the plug of the cord in the hole he thought connected with the instrument on the desk of the head of the firm. Then a call came for Mr. Keen, but, while Tom was making that connection the door of Mr. Cutler's office opened, and that individual fairly rushed out.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked Tom, rather savagely. "Don't you know enough to operate a switchboard?"

"Why—why—what's wrong?" asked Tom innocently.

"Why, you've put the party who wanted Mr. Boise on my wire, and you spoilt a long distance call I had to Taunton. Now I've got to call up again, and maybe I'll lose my party. Why don't you make the right connections?"

"I—I thought I did, Mr. Cutler."

"Well, thinking so isn't going to mend matters. Now give the party that's on my wire to Mr. Boise,

and then see if you can get central for me. I never saw such a poor operator," he murmured, as he went back into his office and slammed the door.

Mr. Boise came out of his office then. He had evidently heard what the junior partner said.

"Try and be a little more careful, Tom," he remarked kindly. "I know you are new at it, and you'll get along all right after a while. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It's better to be sure than sorry, you know. That's an old adage, but it's a good one. Have you changed the party to my wire?"

"Yes, sir," answered Tom, grateful for the kind manner in which the head of the firm spoke.

Tom could not help being a little nervous, but he kept a good grip on himself, shut his teeth firmly together and resolved to make no more mistakes that day. He was glad when the noon hour came, as he could go out and get something to eat, and, while he was gone, one of the junior clerks operated the switchboard. Tom went to a little restaurant where Charley Grove had promised to meet him.

"Well," asked his chum, "how'd you make out?"

"Pretty well, I guess. I made a couple of blunders, and Mr. Cutler, the junior partner, scolded me."

"Aw, don't mind that. Tell him it was the central girl's fault."

"But it wasn't."

"Aw, how do they know? I always blame the girls. They're used to it, and, besides, the bosses never see 'em, so it don't make no difference."

"I don't think I'd like to do that. I'll catch on to it after a while."

"Sure you will. What are you goin' to eat?"

Then the boys began to discuss the bill of fare, and were soon enjoying their lunch as only hungry boys can.

"What time do you get through?" asked Charley.

"Five o'clock, Mr. Boise said."

"How much wages do you get?"

"Nine dollars a week, and I'm to get ten after I've been there a while."

"That's pretty good, for a start. I'm going to strike the boss for another dollar soon. I'm worth more than ten a week to 'em. Why, there's thousands of dollars of business goes over my 'phone every hour, and I ought to get more than ten."

"I hope you do," said Tom cordially. "But say, Charley, I wish you'd do me a favor."

"What is it? Want any money? I ain't got much, 'cause I went to the theatre twice this week."

"No, it isn't money. I have enough for a few days yet, until I get paid. But I wish you'd stop

at my house, on your way home, and tell my mother I have a good place. She'll be anxious to know, and I have no way to send her word."

"Sure, I'll do it. But ain't there some place near there you can call up on the wire, and ask 'em to take the message to her? I do that sometimes, when I'm comin' home late."

"No, I don't know of any place but the drug store, and they might charge for sending a message. Besides, maybe the firm wouldn't like me to use the telephone for my private affairs."

"Aw, it don't make any difference to them. They pay for the wire by the year, and you can use it as often as you like. But I'll stop and tell your mother. I quit at three o'clock. There's no brokerage business done after that."

Tom went back to the switchboard, glad to think his mother would know of his success sooner than he hoped to be able to inform her. During the afternoon he acquired more confidence in himself, and, though once or twice he gave central the wrong numbers, from imperfectly catching them as they were repeated by the members of the firm, Mr. Boise and Mr. Keen did not get angry over the errors. Tom was congratulating himself that he was going to get through the day without further offending Mr. Cutler, when that individual called for a certain number.

Tom gave it to central, and, having made the

connections threw up the cam, in order not to listen to what was being said. Then he leaned back in his chair, for he was tired, and the receiver of the telephone, which was fastened to his head by a spring clip, that held it in place so he could use both hands, made his ear ache. He wished he could take it off.

One of the black signal disks dropped, and Tom, depressing the cam, to ask what was wanted, heard Mr. Cutler speaking to him.

"There you go again!" exclaimed the irate lawyer. "You have given me the wrong number. I called for one-six-four-three, Chelsea, and you have given me one-four-six-three. That's a police station. What do I want of a police station?"

"I'm sorry," murmured Tom. "I'll get the right number for you."

"That was my mistake," came another voice over the wire—the central girl's voice. "I beg your pardon," she added.

"That's all right," said Tom pleasantly. He wished Mr. Cutler could have heard the explanation, but the lawyer, in disgust, had hung up his receiver until Tom should get him the right connection.

"I thought I didn't give the wrong number," mused the boy. "I hope I don't do anything more to annoy Mr. Cutler. He seems to get angry very easily."

Tom was glad when it was time to go home, and he found his mother and aunt ready to welcome him, for Charley had told them the good news.

"I'm so glad!" exclaimed Mrs. Baldwin. "This is the best place you've had yet."

"And so refined," added Miss Ramsey. "I always wanted a lawyer in the family, and now Tom has a chance to be one."

"I'm afraid it will be a good many years before I can learn law over the switchboard, Aunt Sallie."

"Oh, but you will have opportunities. I think it is better to be a lawyer than a bookseller."

"Especially as I haven't any chance to become a bookseller," added Tom with a laugh. "Well, mother, is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, Tom; I have just finished some sewing for Mrs. Crawford Leeth. I wish you would take it home, when I have made out the bill. I think she will pay you, for she owes me for some other work, and she promised to settle for it all when I sent this waist home. So please ask her, if she doesn't offer to give you the money."

"I will, mother. I suppose I'd better not sit on this, in case the car is crowded," he added with a smile.

"Mercy sakes, no!" exclaimed his aunt. "It has some valuable lace on it. Be very careful of it, Tom."

It was quite a long ride to where Mrs. Leeth lived, and it was nearly eight o'clock when Tom arrived. The house was a fine one, in an exclusive residential section, and the door was opened by a colored butler.

"Here's the dress for Mrs. Leeth," said Tom.

"I'll take it," replied the butler.

"But I want to see Mrs. Leeth," insisted Tom, who had in mind his mother's injunction to get the money.

"She am busy."

"Then I'll wait," said Tom firmly, and, holding on to the package, which the butler offered to take from him, he stepped into the hall, and sat down.

"I'll tell her about it," promised the colored man, "but she hab some company, an' I know she won't see you."

"You might take her this," suggested Tom, handing the colored man the bill.

The butler vanished behind some hanging plush portieres, and came back presently to say:

"She'll be heah immejeet, but she doan't laik to be 'sturbed when she hab company. She am very indignant."

"She is, eh?" thought Tom. "So would my mother be if I didn't come back with the money."

Presently there was a swish of silken skirts, and

a handsomely-dressed woman came into the reception hall where Tom sat.

"Have you brought my dress, boy?" she asked sharply.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Tom, rising.

"You are more than two hours late with it. I wanted it to wear this evening, and I am much disappointed."

"I brought it as soon as it was finished. I think there was more work on it than my mother thought."

"She should learn to calculate better then, and not disappoint her customers. You may lay it on the table there, and tell her I am displeased that it is late."

"She asked me to bring back the money for it," said Tom boldly, determined not to be awed by the airs of this society matron. "I gave the butler the bill."

"Yes, I have it; but it is not convenient for me to pay it now."

"My mother particularly wished it, Mrs. Leeth."

"Probably, but I have no change in the house."

"I can take a check," said Tom.

"My husband is at his office downtown, and he will not be home until late. I will send your mother a check to-morrow."

"If you will allow me, I will go down to your

husband's office," suggested the boy. "You can write him a note, authorizing him to give me a check for the bill. Or you can telephone him," he added, seeing an instrument in the rear of the hall.

The woman seemed rather annoyed at Tom's suggestion, but she had no good excuse ready. Rather reluctantly, therefore, she telephoned to her husband at his office, and told him a boy would presently call on him with a bill, for which she requested Mr. Leeth to make out a check.

"Thank you," said Tom, when Mrs. Leeth had given him the business address of her husband.

"I don't believe I shall have your mother do any more work for me," said the handsomely-dressed woman haughtily. "She disappointed me so this evening, by not having my waist here on time."

Tom said nothing, but he rather thought his mother would not care to work for a customer who was so exacting, and so careless about pay.

Tom was soon at the big office building where Mr. Leeth had a suite of rooms. Though it was nine o'clock there were lights in several of the windows, for, it appeared, some of the tenants were working overtime. Mr. Leeth was agent for a big manufacturing concern.

Tom had to climb several flights of stairs to Mr. Leeth's office. He found that gentleman in,

and soon had received a check, which he knew would please his mother.

"Just receipt the bill," requested Mr. Leeth.

While Tom was signing his name to the receipt for the money, the office door opened, and some one came in. The boy did not look up to see who it was, but he heard Mr. Leeth exclaim:

"Ah, come right in. I've been waiting for you. Did you bring the papers and the cash?"

"Yes, but I had a hard time getting the money. The old doctor is getting rather suspicious of late. I trusted his faulty memory——"

The speaker paused suddenly, evidently in response to a warning gesture from Mr. Leeth, for the newcomer had not observed Tom, who was standing at a desk behind the door.

"Thank you, sir," said our hero, as he folded up the check, put it in his pocket, and prepared to leave. As he turned he came face to face with Barton Sandow.

It would be hard to say who was the more surprised, the man or Tom. Mr. Sandow started, and seemed about to say something.

"Ah, are you acquainted?" asked Mr. Leeth in surprise.

"I have met Mr. Sandow," replied Tom, while Dr. Spidderkins' brother-in-law murmured something unintelligible. Then, as the man who had

called Tom a gutter-pup did not notice him, the boy passed out.

"I wonder what he's doing in there?" our hero thought, as he walked down the dimly-lighted corridors. "And he must have been referring to Dr. Spidderkins, when he spoke of the money and papers. I wonder if the old doctor is safe with those two?" he went on, as he thought of the queer actions of Mr. and Mrs. Sandow, and how incapable the aged physician, with his failing memory, was of looking out for his own interests.

Though he did not know it then, Tom had made quite a discovery that night.

## CHAPTER XII

### SEEKING INFORMATION

THOUGH he was very busy the next day, Tom could not help thinking, several times, of the scene he had witnessed the night before, when he received the check.

"I wish I had listened more closely to what Sandow said," he mused. "If I had known it was he, I would have done so. Let me see, it was something about bringing the money and the papers, and that he had a hard time getting the money because the old doctor was getting suspicious. Then he said something about trusting to his faulty memory, and that was all.

"I'm sure he must have referred to Dr. Spidderkins. I don't like the look of that Sandow, and his wife isn't much better. From what I've seen they have the old gentleman right under their thumb, and I guess they could almost make him believe black was white, because he can't remember five minutes at a time, unless it has to do with some book. I wish I knew whether they were

doing anything to make trouble for him. Maybe I'd better speak to some one about it."

But, the more Tom thought of it, the less he liked to mention it to any member of the firm for whom he worked. He had not been there long enough to venture on any confidences, and he realized that the lawyers were too busy to pay attention to any matters that did not directly concern them.

"I guess I'll ask a few questions of Charley Grove," he concluded. "I'll see him this noon at the restaurant."

Tom made no mistakes that morning, and was in better spirits when he went out for his noonday meal. He found his chum waiting for him, and, when he had a chance, spoke of his trip the night previous, to get the check.

"That woman thought she was going to put me off," said Tom, "but I guess I surprised her, when I offered to go for the cash. I met Barton Sandow in Mr. Leeth's office," he added, as though it was of no importance.

"I don't like that fellow," replied Charley. "He was in our office to-day, buying some stocks, and he called me down because I didn't get his number quick enough for him. I didn't dare say anything, 'cause the boss was standing right there, but I took my own time making the connection for him."

"Who did he call up?" asked Tom.

"Why, that fellow you were telling me about—Mr. Leeth. But I couldn't hear what he said, as I had to take care of a lot of calls from customers then. We have five trunk lines on our switchboard. How many have you?"

"Only three. Say, do you suppose there's any truth in what you told me, about Sandow wanting to get hold of Dr. Spidderkins' money?"

"Shouldn't wonder," answered Charley easily. "You could take most anything you wanted away from Doc. Spidderkins now, and he wouldn't know it, if you gave him a book to look at. He's daffy on books, every one says."

"But he's a very fine old gentleman."

"You bet he is. Better that Barton Sandow. I wish I had a chance to call Sandow down, for being so fresh with me," added Charley, for the matter of the telephone call seemed to rankle in his mind.

"He called me a mean name, once," said Tom, telling of the day when he had gone into Sandow's office, to look for work.

That afternoon, just before closing time, Mr. Boise, the head of the law firm, came out to the switchboard.

"How are you getting on?" he asked Tom, pleasantly.

"Pretty well, sir."

"That's good. I think you'll learn to be quite expert in time. I want you to do a little errand for me on your way home," he added, and Tom saw that he had a bundle of papers in his hand. "Do you know where Dr. Spidderkins lives?"

"Why, yes," replied Tom, wondering what was coming.

"That's good. Then you're acquainted in the Back Bay section?"

"Not very well, but I carried books to the doctor's house several times, when I worked for Mr. Townsend."

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten about that. Well, I wish you would take these papers to him, and tell him that I have attended to all his requests. The land matters are all in good shape now, and the estate books are all balanced. Can you remember that, or shall I write a note?"

"Oh, I can remember it. Are you his lawyers?"

"Yes; we do considerable business for him."

"A chum of mine—Charley Grove, whom Dr. Spidderkins used to attend—says the doctor is quite rich," went on Tom, thinking this a good chance to get some more information.

"Yes; he is quite wealthy," said Mr. Boise. "His estate is a large one. Most of it came to him through his father, and his brother left him some when he died. That, together with the doctor's own property, makes him very well-to-do.

But he is so forgetful that we have to make memoranda of everything for him."

"I've had some experience with his short memory," remarked Tom, smiling at the recollection.

"Now don't forget to impress the message on him," cautioned Mr. Boise, "and watch where he puts the papers you give him. Just as likely as not he'll call on me some day, and say he never received them."

"I will," promised Tom, and, when it came time for him to lay aside the telephone head-piece, he did so with a feeling of relief, for he welcomed the long trolley ride to the Back Bay district, even though it would bring him home rather late.

Mrs. Sandow opened the door when our hero arrived at the Spidderkins's mansion.

"Here are some papers for Dr. Spidderkins," said Tom.

"I'll give 'em to him, then you won't have to come in and get mud all over my clean floors," she said, scowling at Tom.

"But I have a particular message to give the doctor."

"Oh, well, then you can come in, I suppose," but Mrs. Sandow did not speak very graciously.

"Ah, glad to see you," greeted the aged physician, who, for a wonder, did not forget Tom this time. "When are you going to bring me my

books? I ordered some of Mr. Townsend today."

"I'm not there any more."

"Oh, that's so. I forgot. Let's see, you told me where you were employed, but my wretched memory has made me forget it."

"I don't believe I told you," replied Tom, "but I'm with Boise, Keen & Cutler. I have brought you some papers from them."

"Oh, yes. I told them to send up the documents, but I had forgotten all about it. I have secured quite a rare book, an early edition of Smollett, and that drove everything else out of my mind. But come into my study."

He led the way into a room, the walls of which were lined with row after row of books. Tom gave him the papers and delivered the message, then, in obedience with the instructions of Mr. Boise, the lad watched to see where Dr. Spidderkins would put the documents.

"I'll lay them on this shelf," the doctor said, "right under this volume of Fielding. Ah, that is a rare and valuable work. Then I'll remember where the papers are. I picked up that book on Fielding the same day I got the first edition of Plutarch's Lives—no, I'm wrong—it was the day I secured, in a second-hand book store, the complete edition of Dickens, with the original illus-

trations. Queer, how some things will slip out of my mind."

"Do you think you'll remember where the papers are now, doctor?" asked Tom.

"Oh, yes, indeed I will. I have occasion to look at the volume of Balzac every day, and——"

"But I thought you said you was going to put them under a book on baseball fielding."

"Baseball fielding! Oh! Ha! Ha! I see. You thought I was going in for sport! No, no, my dear young friend; Fielding is the name of an early English novelist. But I did say Fielding, and not Balzac. There! My memory is getting more and more wretched every day!"

"I guess I don't know much about books," admitted Tom.

"Well, you'll learn. I'm much obliged to you, for bringing the papers. There, I've put them under Mr. Fielding's book—not the baseball fielding, remember, Tom—and they'll be safe until I want them, and I shan't forget where they are."

"If you do I'll try and help you remember," said the boy with a laugh.

Tom bade the doctor good-night, and started out of the door. As he opened the portal, and stepped into the faintly-lighted hall, he thought he heard the rustle of a woman's dress, and he was almost sure he saw a figure hastily disappearing around the corner.

"That must have been Mrs. Sandow," thought Tom, "and I believe she was listening at the doctor's door. There's something queer going on in this house, and I wish I knew what it was."

## CHAPTER XIII

### A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE

THERE was a slight accident on the trolley line that night, when Tom was going home. A truck got stalled on the track, and it was nearly midnight when he got to the house, where he found his mother anxiously waiting for him.

"You poor boy!" she exclaimed. "Where have you been? Did you have your supper?"

"Oh, yes. When I found the trolleys were blocked I got out of the car, which happened to be near a small restaurant, and I had a nice little meal. I had to go to Dr. Spidderkins' house for Mr. Boise."

"I think you have a good deal of night work to do, Tom."

"Well, I'm the youngest member of the firm," replied her son jokingly. "I've got to do the hard work until I rise in my profession."

Tom fell asleep vainly wondering whether or not he had better mention to Mr. Boise the suspicions he had concerning Barton Sandow and his

wife. But, in the morning, he decided he had better not interfere with what did not concern him.

"I'll wait until I have some better proof, before I say anything," he thought. "Maybe I'm making a mountain out of a mole-hill."

For a week or more events went along smoothly at the law office where Tom was employed. He was getting to be quite expert at the switchboard, and seldom made a mistake.

Try as he did, however, he could not seem to please Mr. Cutler. That lawyer was continually finding fault, even when Tom got for him the required connections in almost record-breaking time.

"You're worse than the other boy we had!" exclaimed the junior member one day, when Tom had cut him off a second or two before he was through. Then Mr. Cutler strode into the room occupied by Mr. Boise. As he left the door partly open Tom could not help hearing part of what was said.

"Why don't you discharge that boy and hire a good one?" asked the junior partner, wrathfully.

"What boy?" asked Mr. Boise, who had a habit of becoming so deeply immersed in thinking of a case, that often questions had to be repeated several times.

"That telephone boy—Tom Baldwin. He's more bother than he's worth."

"Why, I thought he was doing good work. I have no trouble getting my connections. What seems to be the difficulty?"

"Well—er—I don't know exactly—but he doesn't seem to be up to the mark. I think we ought to have another boy."

"I am sorry I can't agree with you, Mr. Cutler," Tom heard Mr. Boise say. "Mr. Keen engaged Tom, and he spoke well of his qualifications. The boy has a mother and an aged aunt partly dependent on him, and he was out of work for some time before coming to us. He learned how to work a switchboard, hoping to get a place, and now he has one I don't feel we should discharge him—especially when there is no good cause for it."

"Well, I only mentioned it," said Mr. Cutler, rather weakly. "Perhaps he'll do all right, but he makes mistakes."

"So we all do," remarked Mr. Boise. "I think Tom will be all right."

Then the door was closed, and Tom could hear no more. But what he had heard told him two things, one of which he knew before. He was made aware that Mr. Boise was very friendly to him, and he realized that Mr. Cutler had some

grudge against him, though what it could be our hero could not imagine.

"It can't be about the telephone calls," reasoned the lad, "for I haven't made but one error on his wire in nearly a week, and that was a small one —cutting him off. He was through, anyhow, for the party on the other end of the wire had said 'good-by.' But I'm glad Mr. Boise stuck up for me."

That afternoon, toward the close of the day's business, as Tom was sitting in front of the switchboard, idly wondering where the next call would come from, one of the black drops fell. He plugged in a wire, and asked:

"Whom did you wish to speak to?"

Back came the answer, in a voice that startled Tom, for he knew he had heard it somewhere before:

"Is Mr. Cutler in?"

"I'll connect you with him. Hold the wire," directed Tom, and he made doubly sure that he put the right plug in the right hole, so that the person could speak to the junior partner.

As soon as this connection was made there came another call, for Mr. Boise. The head of the firm was soon conversing with a client, and then a third drop fell.

"Well, the day is going to wind up with a rush,"

thought Tom. "Whom did you wish?" he asked politely.

"I want to talk to Mr. Cutler," spoke a woman's voice.

"He is busy now. If you will hold the wire, I'll let you speak to him as soon as he has finished."

"Very well. Don't forget it. It's very important."

"I'll not. Just hold the wire."

Then, as was his custom, when a party was waiting for one of the law-firm members who was already engaged on the wire, Tom depressed the cam which enabled him to hear whether Mr. Cutler and the speaker whose voice had so startled the boy, were finished. Tom, as he "cut in" heard Mr. Cutler saying:

"Yes, yes, I'll attend to it for you. The plan ought to work, but you've got to be careful."

Then, before he shut off the connection through his own instrument, he heard the man on the other end of the wire say:

"I've got the papers all right. The forgetful old dotard left them in his study, and my wife heard him and the boy talking about them. I've got 'em all right, and he'll never remember anything about them. I guess they ought to be worth something, eh?"

"Yes, indeed," Mr. Cutler replied. "The estate is a big one, and there's no reason why you and

I shouldn't have a share. I guess we can work it without any one knowing anything about it. I'll call you up in a few days Mr.——"

"No names!" cautioned the other quickly.

"All right," answered Mr. Cutler with a laugh. "I understand. Good-by."

Tom knew that the conversation was finished, and that he could give the waiting lady the junior partner on the wire. But he hesitated a moment before pulling out the plugs, and readjusting them.

"I've heard that man's voice before," he mused. "I know it well. Who can it be?"

Then there came over the wire the voice of the man in question. It seemed that he had forgotten something, though Mr. Cutler was busy talking to the lady.

"Hello! Hello!" he called. "I say! I forgot something. Wait a moment, Mr. Cutler!"

"Mr. Cutler is busy on another wire," replied Tom. "If you wait I can get him back for you?"

"Who is this speaking?" asked the man's voice, and there seemed to be a note of fear in it.

"This is the private exchange operator."

"I know that, but who are you? What's your name?"

"Tom Baldwin. Do you wish me to get Mr. Cutler on the wire for you?"

"No!" came the sudden answer, and the man

"No!" came the sudden answer.

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hung up his receiver with a bang that made a loud click in Tom's ear.

Then, like a flash there came to our hero the recognition of the voice.

"That was Barton Sandow speaking!" he exclaimed softly. "I'm pretty sure it was, and I believe he was talking about that Spidderkins estate and those papers I took to the doctor!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### SANDOW IS ALARMED

Tom hardly knew what to do. As he finished his work that afternoon, and started toward home, he had half a mind to go and tell Dr. Spidderkins what he had heard. Then he reflected that he could say nothing definite, and that, after all, the mysterious message might be a perfectly proper one. It might refer to some other person than the eccentric doctor.

"But one thing I'm pretty certain of," thought Tom, "and that is the voice I heard was that of Barton Sandow. Maybe I had better speak to Mr. Boise about it. No, if I do that I'll have to say Sandow was talking to Mr. Cutler, and Mr. Boise will consult with him. Mr. Cutler will accuse me of listening, when I really couldn't help it, and I'll lose my place.

"No, I can't do that. I wish I knew some one I might consult with. Perhaps Mr. Keen would be a good man. He seems kind, and I could ask

him to say nothing about it to Mr. Cutler. I'll think that over."

Which Tom did, after he got to bed that night, but in the morning he was as unsettled as ever.

"I'll not do anything until I'm more certain," he decided. "But if Mr. Sandow calls up Mr. Cutler on the wire again, I'll listen to all he says. I think I have a right to, for I believe he is up to something wrong."

During the days that followed Tom became more and more expert at the switchboard, so that even Mr. Cutler, anxious as he was to do so, could find no fault with the lad.

"Tom, I have some good news for you," Mr. Keen said to him one Saturday afternoon, when he was paying the telephone boy his weekly wages. "In the first place Mr. Boise wants me to tell you that he is very well satisfied with your work."

"I am glad of that."

"And, better than being merely glad about it, he has shown his appreciation in a substantial way. Hereafter your wages will be eleven dollars a week."

"Thank you, very much," replied Tom, "and tell Mr. Boise that I appreciate it."

"I think he knows that. He is a man who likes to help boys get along in the world, and I am sure he will prove your friend."

Tom was delighted at the additional money

every week, and he knew his mother and aunt would share in his joy. He was now getting more than Charley Grove, who had been at the switchboard over a year, for Charley had not received the additional dollar he had "struck the boss for," as he expressed it.

Tom thought this a good opportunity, when Mr. Keen was in such a particularly kindly mood, to broach the subject of Barton Sandow, and the mysterious message, but, just as he was about to mention it, a telephone call came in, and he had to adjust the switchboard. The call was for Mr. Keen, who had remained after the other members of the law firm had departed, and when he had finished talking he hurried away, before Tom had a chance to more than say "good-afternoon."

"I'll speak to him Monday," thought Tom, but, when Monday came, Mr. Keen had to go out of town, and was away for several days.

There came several dull days in the law office, when, for hours at a time Tom would sit at the switchboard and not a call would come in. This was rather tiresome, but he had to remain on duty, as there was no telling when he would have to make the connections.

"I wish I could read," he thought. "Guess I'll ask one of the clerks if there's any objection."

Accordingly, he broached the matter to the

young fellow who relieved him at the board during the noon hour.

"Sure you can read, if you want to," said the youth. "Why don't you start in to read law? This is a good chance. I used to have your job, and one day I was reading a book of adventures. Mr. Boise saw me, and wanted to know what it was. I told him, and I thought he'd object, but he suggested that I start to study law in my spare moments. I did, beginning on a simple book, and finally he made me a clerk. That gave me more time, and I'll be ready for the bar examinations in another year."

"I never thought of that," said Tom. "I believe I would like to know something of law."

"I'll lend you a book to start on," said the clerk kindly, and he handed Tom a volume that did not look very attractive. But Tom was not easily discouraged, and he began it. He found it simpler than he had expected, and he became quite interested in it.

"What have you there?" asked Mr. Boise of him, one afternoon, as the senior partner came in from a late lunch. "Is it the life of 'Fearless Frank, the Boy Scout,' or 'Death-Dealing Dick'? Oh, there's no objection to you reading," he added hastily, as Tom started up in some confusion.

As he did so the book fell down, open, so that the title could be read.

"Ah, the law primer," remarked Mr. Boise. "I am glad to see this, Tom. Not that there is anything wrong in reading a good book of adventure, for I like that sort of a story myself, once in a while, but they are not good as a steady diet. When you finish that book I will loan you another."

He passed on, nodding his head in approval.

Meanwhile, as the days passed, Tom was wondering why Barton Sandow did not call up again.

"Maybe I frightened him," thought the telephone boy.

That afternoon Mr. Keen called Tom into his office.

"I want you to leave a little earlier to-day," he said. "A client of ours is coming to the Parker House. Do you know where that hotel is?"

Tom well knew the location of the famous hotel, the rolls of which have become a byword in many parts of the country.

"I want you to take these papers to Mr. Jonathan Norris, who is stopping there," went on Mr. Keen. "Ask the clerk to show you to his room, deliver the documents, and have him give you a receipt. He is expecting them."

"What about the telephone?" asked Tom.

"I will have one of the clerks look after it for

you, while you are gone. You need not come back here to-night."

Tom liked that, as it would give him about an hour off.

He found Mr. Norris without trouble, delivered the papers, and was walking briskly toward the door of the main entrance, when he nearly collided with Barton Sandow, who was hurriedly entering the hotel.

"Excuse me," said Tom.

"What! You here!" exclaimed Sandow. "I thought—I——"

He seemed quite startled, and Tom wondered what the matter could be.

"Did I hurt you?" he asked.

"Hurt me? No—but you——"

Again Sandow seemed confused.

"Was it you at the telephone switchboard the other day?" he asked, and Tom wondered at the friendly tone he used. It was quite different from the voice in which Mr. Barton Sandow had called our hero a "gutter-pup."

"Yes," replied the boy. "You mean the day you called up Mr. Cutler?"

"That's the day. Did you hear what I said?"

"Part of it," answered Tom.

"You did?" and Sandow seemed quite excited.

"I could not help it. I had to come in on the

wire to see if Mr. Cutler was through, as a lady was anxious to talk to him."

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter," spoke Sandow, with an air of studied indifference. "The message was of no importance. It was about some property I own, and which is in litigation. Mr. Cutler is my lawyer. It's only a small matter."

Tom wondered if it was, why Mr. Sandow should seem so frightened over something, for frightened the man certainly was.

"I don't suppose you reported what you heard to any one; did you?" asked Sandow eagerly.

"No, sir," replied Tom quickly. "It is against orders to speak of the firm's business outside."

"That's right, though in this case it doesn't make any difference. It was of small importance. The affair is closed up now. It was of no importance whatever." And Sandow passed on.

"Well, if it wasn't," thought Tom, who had his own ideas on the subject, "you're taking a great deal of trouble to impress that fact on me."

Wondering more than ever what sort of a game Sandow was playing, Tom left the lobby of the hotel, and started toward home.

## CHAPTER XV

### MR. CUTLER'S VISITOR

"WELL, Tom," asked Mr. Keen, the next morning, "did you deliver the papers?"

"Yes, sir, and Mr. Norris said he would call on you this afternoon."

"Very good; I'll be here. Now get me the surrogate's office, in the court house."

Tom had on a small card, the numbers of the places most frequently called up by the members of the firm, in order to save the time of looking in the telephone book, and he soon had the connection for Mr. Keen.

As our hero was going home that afternoon Mr. Keen gave him a message to deliver to a client who lived in the suburbs, across the Charles River.

"It is quite important," said the lawyer, "or I would not ask you to spend your own time delivering it."

"I don't mind," replied Tom.

"Well, I am sure I appreciate that. Since you are so good-natured about it I think I will ask you to do a little more. This concerns a suit which is to be tried to-morrow. I must have an answer from this gentleman, and he has no telephone. Will you go out there, and bring back the answer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Bring it here to the office," went on Mr. Keen. "I am going to work here quite late, to-night, and, if I should not be in when you get here, leave the answer on my desk, for I may be out to supper."

"I think I can be back here by eight, or, at the most, nine o'clock," spoke Tom.

"That will do very nicely. I expect to be up until nearly midnight, getting the papers in shape for the trial to-morrow. You had better start now, as it is quite a ride out there."

With a bundle of papers in his pocket Tom started off. He had sent word to his mother, by telephoning to a drug store near his house, that he would not be home until late.

Tom rather enjoyed the trolley ride, for it was in a section he had seldom visited.

"I hope I find a restaurant out here," he remarked to himself as the trolley rumbled along. "I'll be mighty hungry by the time I get back."

When he reached the house of the gentleman he had been sent to see, he delivered the papers, and asked:

"How long do you think it will be before you have the answer ready?"

"Why? Do you have to go somewhere else in this neighborhood?" asked the client.

"I would like to go to a restaurant," replied Tom. "Is there one near here?"

"I'm afraid not, but I'd be glad to have you come in and take tea with me."

"Oh, no; I wouldn't like to trouble you."

"It will be no trouble at all. I am all alone this evening, as my wife and daughters have gone to Symphony Hall to a concert. Come in, for it will take me some time to look over these papers, and prepare my answer."

Tom was too hungry to be bashful, and he was soon seated at a table bountifully spread, while a neatly-dressed servant brought him a hot cup of tea, which was grateful after the long cold ride.

The gentleman was so busily engaged with the legal documents that he did not get a chance to eat with Tom, who was all alone at the table, which the boy did not regret, as his appetite was particularly good, and he did not want to feel embarrassed by dining with a stranger.

"There, I think that covers it," said the gentleman at length, as he handed Tom a bundle of papers. "Tell Mr. Keen I will see him at court, in the morning. Did you manage to make out a meal?"

"Yes, sir, and I thank you very much."

It was nearly nine o'clock when Tom reached the office of the law firm in Washington Street. He went up to the big front doors and he did not have to knock, as Mr. Keen had told him to do, as the watchman was on the lookout for him.

"Is it cold out," asked the old man, who had charge of the building nights.

"It's getting colder," remarked Tom. "Feels like snow, too."

"I don't like that," complained the watchman. "It's bad for my rheumatism. I don't suppose that bothers you."

"Not yet," said Tom with a laugh, as he prepared to climb the stairs to Mr. Keen's office, the elevator having stopped running.

He found a light burning in the outer room, where the telephone switchboard was, but Mr. Keen's apartment was in darkness.

"He must be out," thought Tom. "Well, I'll leave the papers on his desk. But there's a light in Mr. Cutler's office. Maybe he's in there."

He started toward the door, but, before he could reach it the portal opened, and Mr. Cutler came out.

"What are you doing here?" he asked Tom sharply. "You have no right in here after office hours."

"I have been on an errand for Mr. Keen," re-

plied Tom. "He told me to leave the answer on his desk."

As he spoke he heard a noise of papers rattling in Mr. Cutler's room, and he knew the lawyer must have a visitor. Mr. Cutler's manner was strange. He seemed much annoyed at beholding Tom.

"Well," he said, "leave the papers and then go home. We don't want the office boys around here after hours."

He turned to go back into his office, and, as he did so, the door swung more fully open. Tom caught a glimpse of a man, and, an instant later he saw that Mr. Cutler's visitor was none other than Barton Sandow. Dr. Spidderkins' brother-in-law uttered an exclamation, as he caught sight of Tom, and then the lawyer hastily closed the door, from behind which came the murmur of voices in eager, earnest conversation.

"He'll never suspect anything," he heard Mr. Cutler say.

"Hush!" cautioned Mr. Sandow. "He's altogether too smart!"

"I hope I can prove too smart for you," thought Tom, as he laid the papers on Mr. Keen's desk. "There's some funny business going on in this office and I think it has to do with the doctor. I'll keep my eyes open."

## CHAPTER XVI

### AN ODD CLIENT

THAT night, when Tom got to bed, he thought so intently about what had happened, that he could hardly sleep. He tried to outline some plan, by which he might get at the bottom of the mystery that seemed to be developing, but he could concoct none that appeared satisfactory.

"I'm sure of one or two things," he said to himself. "One is that Sandow doesn't like me, and, I believe he's a little bit afraid of what he thinks I know. Another is that Mr. Cutler doesn't like me, but he isn't alarmed that I know anything. He'd have me discharged if he could. And another thing is that Sandow and Cutler are in with each other. And the last thing is that it has to do with the estate of Dr. Spidderkins.

"But I don't see what I can do. I don't know anything about law, and if I spoke to Mr. Boise, Cutler might make it appear that everything was all right, and I would only be laughed at. No, I'll lay low for a while yet."

"Well, Tom," said Mr. Keen the next morning, "I see you got the papers all right. I found them on my desk, when I came in. But you should not have opened the envelope they were in. Some of them might have been lost."

"I didn't open the envelope."

"You didn't? Why, I found it open on my desk."

"It was closed when I left it there."

"That's odd," remarked Mr. Keen in a low voice, but he did not in the least doubt Tom's word. "Was there any one in the office but yourself?" he asked. "Maybe the envelope fell to the floor off my desk, and, being quite full, burst open. The janitor may have picked it up."

"Mr. Cutler was in his room, when I came back last night," replied Tom. "He had some one with him. But I don't believe the envelope could have fallen off your desk. I placed it right in the middle."

"Strange how it could have come open then," went on Mr. Keen. "It looks as if the envelope was opened, and then sealed up again, but not securely. Well, it doesn't matter much."

But Tom could see that the lawyer was annoyed by the incident, though the telephone boy was glad there was no hint of suspicion against himself.

At the same time, there came into Tom's mind,

a vague suspicion against Mr. Cutler. Yet, what object would that lawyer have in opening the envelope containing papers in a case, which, presumably, all the partners knew about?

"Or could it have been Sandow?" thought Tom. "He might have sneaked in and opened the envelope, when Cutler left him alone for a minute. That Sandow is a sneak, I believe. I have proof enough of that in the way he tried to make me believe that mysterious message I heard him give Cutler didn't amount to anything."

But Tom had little more time for thought that morning, as the switchboard kept him almost constantly engaged. The firm had several important cases to attend to, and inquiries and messages concerning them were constantly coming in.

"Whew! My ear aches!" exclaimed Tom to himself, after an hour during which he had been engaged in putting plugs in, taking them out, shifting cams and pressing buttons. "This sort of life is lively enough, at times, to suit almost any one. But I guess I'll have a chance now to look at my law book."

For Tom still stuck to the resolution he had made, to "read law" during his spare moments. He was looking intently at the book, yet alert for any telephone call that might come in, when he became aware that a stranger had entered the office. He looked up to see a man, evidently a

farmer in his "Sunday" clothes, standing beside the telephone desk.

"Is my case ready?" asked the man, evidently taking it for granted that Tom was either a member of the firm, or, at least, must keep track of all the cases.

"I don't know," the boy answered politely. "What is the name, please, and who did you want to see?"

"Wa'al, I reckon I want to see Boise, Keen & Cutler. That's the way all the letters is signed that I git. Which one be you?"

"None of them," answered Tom, with a smile. "But if you tell me which member of the firm you wish to see I'll inquire about your case for you."

"Wa'al, I'm switched if I know. Jest as I say, all the letters was signed with the hull three names."

"Were there any initial under the name?" inquired Tom, for it was the practice of the firm to sign the names of all three partners, together with the first letter of the name of whichever particular lawyer happened to dictate the letter.

"Here, look for yourself," invited the farmer, holding out a missive. "That's the last one I got, an' it says my case was comin' off to-day."

Tom looked at the letter. It was one concerning a lawsuit over some water-rights on a farm, and from the fact that the letter "B" was below

the firm signature, the boy concluded that Mr. Boise had written it.

"I guess you want to see the senior partner, Mr. Boise," said Tom. "Take a chair, Mr. Kendall, and I'll find out when he can see you."

"How'd you know my name was Kendall?" asked the odd client sharply. "You ain't one of them gold-brick swindlers, be ye? I understand they call a man by his name as soon as they set eyes on him."

"I saw your name at the top of this letter," replied the boy, handing the missive back.

Then, when the farmer was carefully stowing the letter away in his wallet, Tom quietly slipped a plug into the hole connecting with the 'phone in the room of Mr. Boise, and asked when the lawyer could see Mr. Kendall.

"Send him in in five minutes," came back the answer.

By this time the farmer had buttoned his coat over his pocketbook, and he looked up at Tom.

"Wa'al, when ye goin' to do it?" he asked.

"Do what?"

"Ye said ye'd find out when the head lawyer would see me."

"So I did. He'll see you in five minutes."

"Look a-here, young man!" exclaimed Mr. Kendall. "Don't try none of them tricks. I'm sharp, even if I do come from the country."

"What tricks?" asked Tom innocently, for he was not aware that he had done anything out of the ordinary.

"Why, you said you'd go see when the lawyer would see me. Now you say he'll see me in five minutes. You may be one of them new-fangled mind-readers I've heard tell about, but I don't believe it. I don't take no stock in it. Now you go find out when the lawyer will see me. My time's valuable, for I've got a lot of work to do, out at the farm."

"I did find out, Mr. Kendall. Mr. Boise will see you in five minutes."

"Hold on thar!" exclaimed the farmer. "You can't fool me. I've watched you every minute, an' you ain't left your chair sence I come in. All you've been doin' is play with them there cords. Now you git right up an' find out when Mr. Boise will see me! I ain't so green as I look."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Tom, comprehending. "You see, I telephoned to him."

"Telephoned to him? You can't fool me that way. I know what a telephone is. We've got 'em out our way, an' a bell rings when you telephone. Besides, there ain't no telephone here, and who ever heard of telephonin' from one room to another?"

"But you see this is a private exchange switchboard," explained Tom, and he told how it was

possible to speak to a lawyer in the next room, without leaving his seat. He made it quite clear to the farmer.

"Oh, I understand," said Mr. Kendall. "I'm sorry I made such a fuss about it, 'specially when you ain't well. Did you see a doctor about it?"

"About what?" asked the boy, wondering what new notion the farmer had.

"About your ear ache. I see you have to wear some instrument on yer head. I had a nephew once that had ear ache dreadful bad. We done everything for him, blew smoke into it, put bags of hot pepper in, but it didn't do no good. Then I poured some hot sweet oil in, and that worked fine. Ever try it?"

"But I have no ear ache."

"You ain't? Then what ye got that contraption on yer head for?"

"Oh, that's the telephone receiver. I have it clamped over my ear so I will have both hands free to use on the plugs."

"Oh!" remarked Mr. Kendall. "I wondered what in the world it was for. Suthin' like blinders on a hoss."

Just then one of the drops fell, and Tom, inserting a plug, heard Mr. Boise speaking to him.

"I'll see Mr. Kendall now," he said.

"Mr. Boise will attend to your case now," repeated Tom to the farmer.

"Wa'al, I'll be switched, ef that ain't quite an invention," exclaimed the farmer, as he arose to go into the inner office. "I never heard of telephonin' to a man twenty feet from ye. Next thing they'll be havin' flyin' machines t' go from one room t' another."

## CHAPTER XVII

### A MEAN PLOT

THE farmer chuckled at his joke, as he passed into the apartments of Mr. Boise, whence, presently, his voice could be heard discussing his case.

"I wouldn't care for many clients like him," thought Tom, "though he meant well enough. I'd have to explain too much to them."

He resumed his perusal of the law book, until a drop of one of the black disks told him some one from outside wished to talk to a member of the firm. The call was for Mr. Cutler, and, when he had made the connection Tom threw up the cam, so that he could not hear what was being said.

For, several times of late, the junior partner had accused the telephone boy of listening to the conversations that went on over the wire.

"I'll not give him a chance this time," thought Tom.

A little later he received a call from the central girl operator. One of the trunk lines did not work just right, and the girl wanted Tom to test

it, before a man was sent out to repair it. The young lady was a pleasant-voiced one, and, before he knew it, Tom was exchanging a few jokes with her.

She suggested how he himself might get the wire to work better, by making a little adjustment to the switchboard, and he did so.

"How's that?" he asked. "Can you hear me any better?"

"Much better," she replied. "You ought to go into the telephone business."

Then, whether it was something he unconsciously did to the switchboard, or whether the central operator made some unusual connection, Tom never knew. At any rate he found he was "cut in" on the wire over which Mr. Cutler was talking.

And, as Tom listened for a moment, not meaning to, he became aware that the man on the other end of the wire was Barton Sandow. And what he said was this:

"I'm almost ready to do the trick now. I have the papers safe."

Then there came a buzzing on the wire, and Tom heard no more, but he had listened to enough to understand that whatever game there was between Sandow and the junior partner was still being carried on.

"I want to test that other wire," came the voice of the central girl, a moment later, and Tom, at

her request "gave her a ring," that is, he depressed the button which flashed a tiny electric light on the switchboard at which she sat in the distant central office.

"That's all right," she announced. "Good-by."

"I believe I'd like to meet that girl," thought Tom. "If it wasn't against the rules for her to talk to me, except on business, I'd ask her name. I've almost a good notion to do it anyhow. But I don't want to get her into trouble. I must ask Charley Grove what would happen in case a supervisor overheard her talking to me just for fun."

He was interrupted in his pleasant thoughts by the necessity of disconnecting Mr. Cutler's 'phone, as the drop of a disk indicated that the lawyer was through talking. Then a door opened and Mr. Boise and Mr. Kendall came out into the main office.

"Wa'al, I'll do jest as you say, of course, Mr. Boise," the farmer was saying, in his loud voice. "If you think it's best to let my neighbor Simpson start to tear out that dam, an' then git an injunction, I'm willin' to do it. Only I'd stop him with a gun, if I had my way."

"No; if you leave the matter in our hands, you must do as we say," insisted Mr. Boise. "But don't let it be known that you are going to let him start to destroy the dam that holds back the water. In fact don't mention it anywhere. I'd

rather you wouldn't have spoken of it here, as you never know who will hear what you will say, and, if this got out, it might lose you your case."

"Is that so? I didn't mean to speak so loud. But I guess your telephone boy won't tell, will he?"

"Oh, no," answered Mr. Boise with a smile. "We trust Tom, but it's best to be on the safe side."

Tom was grateful for this mark of confidence. As he turned in his chair, to pick up his bookmark that had fallen to the floor, he caught sight of Mr. Cutler's door. It was partly open and the lawyer was peering out, looking at the farmer and Mr. Boise. As he saw Tom's eyes turned toward him, the junior partner quickly closed the portal.

"He was listening," thought Tom. "I'm getting more and more suspicious of him every day. Yet, perhaps, I have no right to be."

But if Tom could have overheard what was said between the young lawyer and Barton Sandow that night, when the two met in a certain café near Scollay Square he would have had more cause than ever for his suspicions.

"Do you think it will work?" Sandow asked, after the two had conversed at some length.

"It's bound to. I'll telephone when Tom is out at lunch. One of the clerks is left in charge, and I can easily get rid of him for a few minutes, on some excuse."

"But can you imitate his voice?"

"Whose? Tom's? Oh, well enough. Kittridge, the lawyer who has the other side of the Kendall case, doesn't know my voice, and he doesn't know Tom in the least. I'll pretend I'm the office boy, and that I have a grudge against the firm, because they won't raise my wages. All Kittridge needs is a tip about the dam, and he can win the case. Kendall will lose it, and then I'll casually suggest to Boise that there must have been a leak somewhere. There'll be an inquiry, and Tom will be discharged. Then we can proceed without having him sneaking in on us, at every chance he gets."

"Yes, it will be easier with him out of the way. The old doctor has taken quite a notion to him. But he's so forgetful everything ought to be easy."

"Did you bring the papers?"

"Yes; here they are. He left them in his study under a book, but, as there are five hundred books there he'll have a task to remember under which one they were put. He can't remember, and, before he can do anything to protect himself, the property will be disposed of, and you'll have your share."

"Not so loud," cautioned Elias Cutler, looking around apprehensively. "Some one might hear you."

"Why, you're not afraid, are you?"

"No—not exactly, as everything is safe, but be careful, Barton."

"If we get rid of Tom Baldwin we'll have nothing more to fear, as neither Boise nor Keen suspect that we have anything to do with each other; do they?" asked Mr. Sandow.

"Not in the least. If they did—well, I know I'd be looking for another position."

The two conversed for some time further, and then prepared to separate.

"When will you work the trick?" asked Mr. Sandow.

"As soon as possible. To-morrow, if I get a chance."

It was several days after this that, one afternoon, Mr. Boise came into the office from the court house, where he had been all day, trying a case.

"What's the matter?" inquired Mr. Keen, of his partner. "You look annoyed."

"And I have good cause to be," replied the lawyer. "I lost the Kendall case."

"What! That one where the old farmer was mixed up in some action over water rights and a dam?"

"That's it. I had a good case, and we were going to apply for an injunction as soon as Simp-

son, who is the party Kendall had the dispute with, started to cut the dam. But, it seems Simpson's lawyer, Amos Kittridge, got wind of the affair. He knew what we were going to do, and he took action that caused our case to be thrown out of court. My client, Mr. Kendall lost, and he is very angry about it."

"How do you suppose Kittridge learned of your side of the case?" asked Mr. Keen, while Tom listened anxiously.

"I don't know. He's a trickster, but when he won he laughed at me, and as much as hinted that the leak came from this office."

"From this office?"

"Yes. He advised me to pay my help better, then they wouldn't be dissatisfied, and give away the details of our cases. I tell you, Mr. Keen, this is a serious matter, and I am going to have an investigation. I want to see all the clerks in my office. Some news went out of here that shouldn't have gone, and it lost us the case. It was given over the telephone, Kittridge as much as said. Tom, I shall have to question you. Do not go home this afternoon, until I have seen you. Kittridge is a trickster, and a sneak, but what he did is legal, though it is not right. But if I find out who gave him the tip, it will go hard with him!"

Mr. Boise looked sterner than Tom had ever

seen him before, and the telephone boy, though he knew he had had nothing to do with the matter, felt a little apprehensive.

"If some one used this telephone to talk to Mr. Kittridge with," mused Tom, "it may involve me."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### TOM IS ACCUSED

"SEND the clerks into my office," said Mr. Boise to Mr. Keen, as he passed into his own apartment. "We'll sift this matter to the bottom."

One by one the clerks passed into the room of the senior partner. Low but earnest voices could be heard from behind the closed door. Several telephone inquiries came for Mr. Boise, but Tom had been instructed to turn the clients over to Mr. Keen, as Mr. Cutler was out.

One by one the clerks came from the room of Mr. Boise. They looked worried, but not guilty, and all, evidently, had succeeded in proving to the satisfaction of their employer that they, at least, were not guilty of betraying the firm's secret.

As the last clerk emerged, Mr. Cutler came into the office. He seemed quite excited over something, and, as Mr. Boise came from his room at that moment, the two members of the firm met.

"I hear you lost the Kendall case," began Mr. Cutler.

"Yes, I——"

"I suppose you know how it came about," interrupted the junior partner, with a vindictive glance at Tom.

"That is what I have been trying to find out."

"I think I can tell you."

"You? What do you mean?"

"I mean that the secret of the injunction about the dam was betrayed by some one in this office."

"I fear as much, but I have been unable to discover who mentioned it, unless one of us three partners did so," added Mr. Boise with a smile.

Cutler started. Then he said:

"I fancy if you were to ask the telephone boy about it he might be able to tell something."

"The telephone boy? Tom? Do you mean him?"

"That's who I mean!" exclaimed Mr. Cutler sharply.

"I never said a word over the telephone, or in any other way about this Kendall suit, or any other!" exclaimed Tom indignantly. "I never talk about the firm's business outside!"

"No?" remarked Mr. Cutler sneeringly. "Then how did it happen that I heard you calling up Kittridge's office the other day?"

"Calling up Mr. Kittridge's office?" repeated Tom. Then he remembered that Mr. Boise had

had that lawyer on the wire, refusing a postponement of the case. He told the circumstances.

"Yes, that is so," acknowledged Mr. Boise. "But why do you accuse Tom, Mr. Cutler?" and he looked sharply at the junior partner.

"Because of something I overheard between Kittridge and one of his clerks."

"What was that?"

"I just came from the court house," went on Mr. Cutler. "I heard you had lost your case, and I saw Kittridge and his clerk laughing over their success. Then I overheard Kittridge say: 'We never would have won the case, but for a tip Boise's office boy gave me. He called me up, and said he had a grudge against the firm because they wouldn't raise his wages, and then he let out about the injunction.' That's what Kittridge said."

"That's not so!" cried Tom indignantly. "I never spoke to Mr. Kittridge, over the telephone, or otherwise, in my life; I merely got his office once on the wire for Mr. Boise."

"I know what I'm talking about!" declared Mr. Cutler. "I say you gave this fact to Kittridge, and I can prove it. You are responsible for this leak, and I think you had better discharge him, Mr. Boise, and get a boy we can trust. He used to listen to persons talking to me, until I put a stop to it."

"I never listened unless it was absolutely neces-

sary, in order to put some other party on your wire!" said Tom hotly.

"I think you had better discharge him," went on the junior partner. "I know where we can get a boy we can depend on."

"This is a serious accusation," said Mr. Boise slowly. "Are you—pardon me—are you sure of your facts, Mr. Cutler?"

"Positive. Why, ask Kittridge."

"No; I would not like to do that. I would not want to let him know we have some one here we can not trust," but, though he spoke sadly, Mr. Boise did not look accusingly at Tom. "I have another plan," the senior partner went on. "I will ask the telephone company to make an investigation. They keep a record of all calls, and they can tell whether there were more than one call for the Kittridge office within the last few days. One I used myself. If there is another on the record——"

"It means that it was the one when the secret of the case was given away," interrupted Mr. Cutler.

"It does not absolutely prove it, however," went on Mr. Boise. "Some one may have called him up from outside."

"Yes; but who knew about the plan to let Simpson partly destroy the dam, so that an injunction might be secured?" asked Mr. Cutler.

"Well, unfortunately, Mr. Kendall mentioned it aloud in the office here one day," admitted Mr. Boise. "I cautioned him to be careful, but he spoke before I could prevent him. I don't know who heard him. There was no other clients in at the time."

"No; but Tom was," insisted the junior partner.

"Yes; I heard Mr. Kendall's remarks about the dam," admitted the telephone boy. "But I never spoke to a soul about it. You were also in your office at the time, Mr. Cutler," he could not help adding, "and your door was open."

"What! You dare accuse me?" cried the lawyer. "The idea! The impudence. Boise, I demand his discharge at once!"

"Wait a minute," spoke the senior partner calmly, "I do not believe Tom meant to accuse you of giving our secret away."

"No, sir," put in Tom.

"He only meant that other persons besides himself heard what Mr. Kendall so foolishly said. But I shall investigate this further. I will go to the telephone company at once. Tom, remain here until I return."

Mr. Cutler, with a vindictive glance at the boy, passed into his private office, and Tom, with a dull, leaden feeling in his heart, saw Mr. Boise go out. Our hero waited anxiously for what might happen next.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A GIRL'S TESTIMONY

WHEN Mr. Boise had gone Tom sat at the switchboard, but he had lost all interest, for the present, in the law book. It was closed, and his thoughts were all centered on the queer happenings in which he was involved.

It was getting rather late, and the building was gradually becoming quiet, as the various tenants passed out and closed up their offices.

Tom wondered how long he would have to stay, and whether he had better send some word to his mother about the delay. Then he decided it would be best not to. He might have to go home with bad news soon enough—news that he had been discharged—though he knew he was innocent, and he hoped Mr. Boise would be able to prove this.

Presently the door of Mr. Cutler's room opened, and that lawyer came out.

"Has Mr. Boise returned yet?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Have all the clerks gone?"

"I believe so."

Mr. Cutler started into Mr. Keen's room. He looked in, to discover that his partner was not there.

"Has Mr. Keen gone home?" he inquired.

"I believe so."

"Look here!" exclaimed Mr. Cutler suddenly, coming close to Tom, "why don't you get out of here."

"Get out of here? What do you mean?"

"I mean before Mr. Boise returns. He'll probably find out exactly what you did, and then he'll discharge you. If you go now, he'll not have the opportunity, and you'll stand a better chance of getting another place."

"Why, that would be running away!" exclaimed Tom indignantly. "That would be like admitting I was guilty."

"Well, aren't you?"

"No, sir!"

"Oh, come now," went on Mr. Cutler, in a more friendly tone than he had ever before used toward Tom. "I think I know all about how it happened. You felt a little grieved—perhaps because I have scolded you once or twice. You wanted to get even, and, when you heard that conversation about the dam, you determined to mention it to the lawyer on the other side. Of course, it was very wrong, but I don't believe you'll do it again.

"I want to help you, even if you did wrong. Now I'm advising you for your own good. You can leave now, and I'll tell Mr. Boise you are sorry for what you did. He'll forgive you, I'm sure. I'll even help you get another job."

"Do you mean you think me guilty, yet you would help me get another position like this?" asked Tom, determined to see how far Cutler would go.

"Well—er—maybe not a place like this, in a law office, for they would be sure to ask questions. But I'd get you a good place. Come, now, you'd better leave before Mr. Boise gets back with the proof of your guilt."

"I don't see how he can get proof of my guilt, when I am not guilty."

"Oh, I understand all about that," went on the lawyer, earnestly, as though he was anxious to hurry Tom to a decision. "I was young once myself. You acted hastily. I think I can explain it to Mr. Boise."

"No!" exclaimed Tom indignantly. "I'll not run away! I never sent that message, and Mr. Boise will be so informed at the telephone office. Why, if I went now he would have every reason to think me guilty!"

"Well, I've done my best for you," answered the lawyer, as he turned impatiently aside.

"When you're discharged, and looking for a place, don't blame me. It's your own fault."

"I'll not blame you," spoke Tom. "I'm not afraid of the consequences. I trust Mr. Boise. He'll not discharge me unjustly. But if he does, perhaps I can get a place with Dr. Spidderkins," he said, as a sudden thought came to him.

"Dr. Spidderkins! What sort of a place can you get with him? He doesn't practice any more?"

The lawyer seemed strangely excited.

"I know that," replied Tom, "but perhaps he would be glad to hire me to help look after his estate. I understand he has quite a large one, and that his brother-in-law would like to get possession of it."

"What's that? What are you saying?" demanded Mr. Cutler almost shouting the words, as he started toward Tom, as though he would strike him. "Are you making threats—you—you——"

He seemed to be so angry, or so alarmed, that he could not speak. Before Tom could make reply, or the lawyer ask any more questions, the door opened and Mr. Boise entered.

The senior partner of the firm was not alone. Behind him stood a pretty girl, who glanced around the office and then frankly smiled at Tom. He thought she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

"Well, I suppose you found out that I was right about it; did you not?" asked Mr. Cutler.

"Not exactly," replied the senior partner. "There were two messages sent from this office, lately, to Mr. Kittridge."

"Ah, I thought so," murmured Mr. Cutler, while Tom was wondering what the pretty girl could have to do with the case.

"One message was the one which I sent," went on Mr. Boise. "The other was sent the day before the case came to trial. The manager of the company looked up his records, and he made a suggestion which I think will solve the problem."

"What is that?" asked Mr. Cutler, while he glanced uneasily at the pretty girl.

"It is this: The manager suggested that the young lady in charge of that part of the switchboard in the main office, where our wires are, might remember something about it. He sent for her, and I had a talk with her. She does remember the two calls for the office of Kittridge, for the reason that, at present his is the only telephone on a particular circuit."

"But can she tell who called?" asked Mr. Cutler.

"Not exactly. I laid the case before her, and she said she was sure of one thing."

"What is that?"

"That is that the person who is regularly at

our switchboard did not call for the office of Kittridge the second time."

"That's nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Cutler. "How can she remember a person's voice?"

"You may ask her yourself," said Mr. Boise, as he turned to the pretty girl. "Allow me to introduce to you Miss Minnie Renfield, who is the young lady in charge of the trunk lines from our office. Miss Renfield, just tell Mr. Cutler and Tom, here, what you told me."

"I have been a central operator for a number of years," said Miss Renfield, with an engaging smile. "I have a very good memory for voices. After I hear a voice over the telephone once or twice, I never forget it. Several of my friends can do the same thing.

"I know the voice of your private exchange operator very well. I have had quite some conversation with him lately, about one of the wires that was out of order. I know his voice as soon as he calls for a number."

Tom smiled. This, then, was the girl whom he had wished to meet. He had his wish, now, but he would have been glad had it been under happier circumstances.

"Do you mean to say that you can recognize voices over the telephone?" demanded Mr. Cutler.

"Yes, sir; I can. I remember the two calls for the Kittridge office. I have to make a note of

every call, and those two were on a new wire, that has recently been put in. The first call was made by your regular operator, I am sure of that."

"That was the time I had Tom get Kittridge for me, when I refused to consent to an adjournment," put in Mr. Boise.

"But the second call? The call when the secret was disclosed?" asked Mr. Cutler.

"That was not made by your operator here," said Miss Renfield firmly.

"Are you sure?" demanded the junior partner.

"Quite sure. I recall wondering at the time who was calling up. The call came in at one fifty-seven."

"This is preposterous!" exclaimed Mr. Cutler. "No one can remember that!"

"I made a record of it," declared the young lady. "It was exactly one fifty-seven."

"And that's the time I was out to lunch!" exclaimed Tom suddenly. "I was with my chum, Charley Grove! He can prove it!"

Mr. Cutler looked confused. But he was not going to give up yet.

"I think this young lady means all right," he said, "but I doubt if she can so readily distinguish voices over the wire. I believe she is in error. I think Tom Baldwin sent that message."

"I believe I can prove that I am right, and that

he did not," answered Minnie Renfield, confidently. "Will you allow me?"

"Certainly," answered Mr. Boise. "This is a serious matter, and I want it cleared up."

"Then I am going to propose a little experiment," said the girl with a smile at Tom.

## CHAPTER XX

### VINDICATION OF TOM

THE two lawyers and the telephone boy looked curiously at Miss Renfield.

"I am going out to some telephone," she said. "I will then call up the office, and each of you, in turn, may speak to me over the wire. I am sure I can tell exactly who is talking, though I am not very familiar with this gentleman's voice," and she looked at Mr. Cutler.

"That is the junior member of our firm," explaind Mr. Boise. "I think that will be a fair experiment."

"I hope it will convince Mr. Cutler that I can recognize voices over the wire," went on the central operator.

"It ought to be easy to do that," sneered Mr. Cutler. "You know that only we three are here."

"You may bring in any other persons you choose," said Miss Renfield readily, "and, though I may not be able to tell who they are, by name,

I will be able to distinguish their voices from yours."

"That will do," assented Mr. Boise. "We are ready for the test; eh, Tom?"

"Certainly," replied our hero, grateful to the girl who had, so opportunely, come to his aid.

Miss Renfield went out, and, in order to make the experiment more certain, a couple of clerks from a neighboring office, who happened to be staying late, were called in. The real reason for the experiment, however, was not explained to them.

Presently Miss Renfield called up. As there were several branch telephones in the law office, at Mr. Boise's suggestion himself, his partner, Tom, and the two clerks each took one, and Tom connected them all on one central wire.

"Now we are ready," said Mr. Boise, over the wire.

"Oh, you are Mr. Boise," exclaimed the girl. "I would know your voice anywhere."

"That was easy enough to do," spoke Mr. Cutler, and he talked right into the telephone which was before him, on his desk. Those engaged in the experiment were in rooms opening from the main one, where the switchboard was, and could see each other.

"That was Mr. Cutler," came back Miss Renfield's tones, calmly.

"Ah! She had you that time!" exclaimed Mr. Boise.

He motioned for one of the clerks to speak, and the girl at once announced that a stranger was talking. Then the senior partner nodded to Tom.

"That's the switchboard boy!" exclaimed the girl, so that all heard her. "I know his name is Tom, but I don't know his last name."

"Baldwin," answered our hero, blushing the least bit. "I am much obliged to you."

The experiment was tried for some time longer, but each time Miss Renfield was able to tell whether one of the strange clerks, or Mr. Boise, Tom, or Mr. Cutler was speaking.

"I think that is proof enough," remarked Mr. Boise to her over the wire. "Come in, please."

The two clerks left, Mr. Boise thanking them for their assistance, and Miss Renfield came back to the office.

"I am fully satisfied," said the senior partner, "that this young lady is right."

"Then you think Tom did not send that message?" asked Elias Cutler.

"I do not believe he did."

"Well, who is guilty, then?"

"I can not say. I suppose you would not be able to tell, if you heard the voice of every one in my employ, which voice it was that talked the

second time to the law office of Mr. Kittridge?" he asked the girl.

"Of course, she wouldn't!" exclaimed Mr. Cutler hastily. "That would be impossible. If she could, it would be no evidence."

He seemed alarmed over something.

"I would not like to make a decision regarding a voice when such an important matter is involved," said the girl gravely. "I am not familiar with some of the tones of your clerks, as they only talk over the 'phone occasionally. But I could not be mistaken in the voice of Tom Baldwin," she added, as she smiled once more at the boy whom she had so completely vindicated.

"I am glad of it," remarked Mr. Boise. "I never for a moment believed Tom guilty, but I am glad his innocence is so firmly established. I am afraid we shall not discover who sent the message, but I am sure of one thing."

"What is that?" asked his partner quickly.

"That whoever did it is an enemy of this firm —I may say a traitor, for it was some one in this office, of that I am positive. If I ever discover who it was, I shall deal severely with him."

Mr. Cutler turned aside and entered his office without a word.

"I believe I need detain you no longer, Tom," said Mr. Boise. "It is long after your regular hour. I think we shall have to raise your salary

again, if we keep you working overtime like this," and he smiled at the boy.

"I don't mind staying," said Tom genially, "though of course if you're going to give me more money, I'll not get out an injunction against you," and he laughed.

"Ah, I see that you are coming on with your study of the law," commented his employer. "Well, we'll take the matter under advisement," he said, in the manner of a judge finishing up a case, "and we will let you know later. Good-night. Good-night, Miss Renfield."

Tom and the central girl walked out of the office together.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you," said Tom, as they went down in the elevator.

"Oh, that's nothing," replied his companion, whom Tom, stealing a look at now and then, thought quite the prettiest girl he had ever seen. It was the second time he had thought the same thing that day.

"So you are the young lady who told me how to fix the cord and plug," went on our hero.

"Yes. You see I've been in the central office for some years now, and I'm getting quite interested in the work. I have a brother who is an electrician, and he tells me lots about the instruments, so I have more advantages than the other

girls. I often fix my switchboard when it gets out of order."

"You are quite talented."

"Oh, it comes natural to me. But, say, I didn't want to speak of it to Mr. Boise, but I have a suspicion who sent that message."

"Who?" asked Tom quickly.

"Well, I shouldn't want you to repeat it, but when that cross man—Mr. Cutler, I believe his name is—when he was talking this afternoon, his voice sounded a good deal like the one that sent the second message to the Kittridge firm. I am not positive enough of it to tell Mr. Boise so, for I think Mr. Cutler tried to disguise his voice, but I'd advise you to keep your eyes open."

"I will," declared Tom. "I think he has a grudge against me, because I found out something about him. I'll be on the watch, and the next queer move he makes, I'll tell Mr. Boise."

The two young people walked on together for some distance farther, and Tom was glad to find that the pretty girl lived quite near him.

"I wish I could meet your brother," he said. "Perhaps he would tell me something about telephones, so I could fix my switchboard if it got out of order."

"Come around some evening, and I will introduce you to him," promised Miss Renfield, and Tom earnestly said that he would make the call.

## CHAPTER XXI

### TOM TELLS HIS SUSPICIONS

"WELL, Tom," began the telephone boy's mother that evening, "how are you getting on at the office? You haven't told us much about it lately, but I notice that you stay quite late at times. They ought to give you more money for that."

"Perhaps they will, mother. Mr. Boise said this afternoon that he would think about raising my wages again, though I now get more than do other boys in places like mine."

"How are you coming on with your law work?" inquired his aunt. "I wish you could soon begin to practice. Some years ago I invested a little money I had in some mining stock. I never realized anything from it, and I believe I was swindled. I wish you could sue the company. I can't afford to hire a lawyer, but if you are going to be admitted to the bar, perhaps you could take my case as the first one."

"I'm afraid it will be a good while before I can practice law," remarked Tom with a laugh. "But

when I do, Aunt Sallie, I'll take your case without a retainer."

"I'll give you half of whatever you get from the mining company, Tom."

"Then I'll buy an automobile," answered our hero, with a laugh.

He said nothing to the folks at home about what had happened that afternoon, as he did not want his mother and aunt to needlessly worry. Yet, Tom was beginning to feel more and more that he should tell some one his suspicions regarding Mr. Cutler and Borton Sandow.

Tom had a chance to speak of his suspicions the following day. When he was at the switchboard he heard some one ask for Mr. Cutler, and he made the connection. He recognized the voice. It was that of the man who had often spoken before to the junior partner, and this unseen man, Tom decided, was Barton Sandow.

The message was a brief one, and, under the circumstances Tom felt justified in listening to it.

"I will call you up there to-night," said the person whom the telephone boy believed was the rascally brother-in-law of Dr. Spidderkins.

"I'll be here," replied Mr. Cutler. "Make it about midnight, and we'll not be disturbed, and no fresh central girl will listen to our talk. Get the rest of the papers to-day, and we'll wind up the matter."

"So, the game is almost over," mused Tom, as he pulled out the plugs, for the two had finished talking. "I think I had now better tell Mr. Boise my suspicions."

He did so after office hours that afternoon, when the senior partner was alone in his room, and the clerks had gone home. Tom related the incident of the first mysterious message he had heard, how Barton Sandow had tried to make him believe it was of no importance, and how he had seen Sandow and the junior partner in consultation one night at the office.

"And you think they are trying to swindle Dr. Spidderkins out of his estate?" asked Mr. Boise thoughtfully.

"That is my suspicion. And I think that Mr. Crawford Leeth is also mixed up in it. I saw Sandow at his office one night."

"Perhaps you are right, Tom. It is not a very nice thing to have to confess, but I have, for some time, been suspicious of Mr. Cutler. I am sorry I admitted him to partnership in our firm. He was a sharp young lawyer, and I thought he would do good work, but he seems constantly planning and scheming. I think he knows more about the leak regarding the Kendall suit than he would be willing to admit."

"I believe so, too," agreed Tom. "What do you think we had better do?"

"You say Mr. Sandow agreed to call him up to-night?"

"Yes; about midnight. I think Mr. Cutler is coming here then."

"Yes; he is. He spoke to me about it, saying he wanted to prepare some papers in a case he had to try to-morrow. I thought nothing of that, as he frequently comes here nights. Perhaps he has often met Sandow here."

"I know he did once," replied Tom.

"Desperate cases require desperate treatment," spoke Mr. Boise musingly. "Tom, I am going to have you do something, which, if we were dealing with different people I would not like to ask of you. But I want to find out whether or not Mr. Cutler is involved with Sandow in robbing Dr. Spidderkins. The only way I can do this is to know what goes on between them to-night. If you, or I, could hear what is said over the telephone——"

"I think I can fix that!" exclaimed Tom. "I can so connect up the switchboard that I can conceal myself in one of the rooms here, and hear whatever is said."

"That will be a good plan. You have my permission to do so."

They talked the matter over at some length, and finally it was arranged that Tom should go home, get his supper, and then return to the office. He

would station himself in one of the clerk's rooms, furthest away from the apartment where the switchboard was located.

Then, when Sandow called up the suspected lawyer, the telephone boy could listen to what was said. He hoped to hear enough to enable him to expose the two plotters.

"I shall be late again to-night," said Tom to his mother when he went home to supper.

"Late again, Tom? Why, what is the matter?"

"Well, we have some legal business to attend to."

"Has it anything to do with my mining shares?" inquired his aunt.

"No; but if this goes through, they may make me a partner in the firm, and then I'll take your case."

All three laughed, for the little family was in better shape financially than it had been for some time. Tom's wages went a long way toward supporting the two lonely women, and, with what sewing Mrs. Baldwin and her sister could do, they had no fears, at least for the present.

In accordance with the plan he and Mr. Boise had made, Tom concealed himself in the clerk's room about ten o'clock. He wanted to be in plenty of time.

The big office building was deserted, except for the watchman, and there was no noise, save his

footsteps as he went from floor to floor, ascertaining that everything was all right. Gradually it became more silent down in the street, as the traffic grew less.

"I hope he comes," thought Tom, as he sat in a chair in a dark corner, the branch telephone ready to his hand.

Midnight struck on a distant church bell. Tom, who caught himself nodding, sat up with a start. Surely that was a noise of some one coming along the corridor. It might be the watchman. No, it was some one coming into the law offices.

Tom heard a key inserted in a lock. Then some one entered. There was the click of an electric-light switch being turned on, and then Tom knew Mr. Cutler had kept the appointment.

The boy, drawing back farther into the shadow, heard the lawyer going from room to room. Evidently he was taking no chances on being discovered.

"I wonder if he'll come in here," thought Tom. He got up from the chair, and silently hid behind a big filing cabinet. And not a moment too soon, for, the next instant, the door opened and Mr. Cutler came in, turning on a light as he did so.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE MISSING PAPERS

TOM hardly breathed, fearful lest he might be discovered. But the lawyer was apparently satisfied with casually looking into the room, for, in a moment, he had turned out the light and Tom heard him going back to the main apartment.

"Now to listen to what they say," thought the telephone boy. "I hope Sandow calls him up."

No sooner had he spoken than he heard from outside, the buzz which told that one of the disk signals had fallen. Tom had purposely left the buzzing arrangement on, so that he might know when the call came in.

"There it is," he went on. But it did not continue long for Mr. Cutler shifted the lever controlling it, and the buzzing ceased. The lawyer knew how to operate the switchboard.

Tom softly lifted the receiver from the hook of the instrument at his side. He did it carefully in order that the click, which always takes place when this is done, might sound as softly as pos-

sible in the listening ear of Mr. Cutler. Then Tom heard voices in conversation, and he knew that the two plotters were making their plans. He listened intently.

"Is everything ready?" he heard the lawyer ask.

"Everything," was Sandow's reply. "I got him to sign the deeds and mortgages this afternoon. He didn't realize what they were. I told him they were some orders for books he had purchased, and he is so forgetful that he believed me. He is getting worse every day."

"All the better for our purpose then. Well, if you have all the papers signed, send them to me at this office to-morrow."

"What will that mean?" asked Sandow, who knew little about law.

"It will mean that the property will belong to your wife and you—after I have attached my signature as witnessing that of Dr. Spidderkins. But of course, I get my share or——"

"Of course, you will," Sandow hastened to assure his fellow-schemer. "I'll do just as I promised."

"You'd better," announced Cutler grimly, "or I could have you held for fradulently obtaining the deeds and mortgages."

"What about yourself?"

"Oh, a lawyer knows enough to look out for himself. But everything will be all right."

"I hope that meddlesome boy doesn't interfere again," Tom heard Sandow say. "Did you get him discharged?"

"No; my plan didn't work. Boise brought in a central girl, and she said it wasn't Tom's voice that gave the secret away. I believe the little witch suspected me. I'll have to be careful. Now don't come here to see me, and don't call me up. I think Boise also suspects me, and I'll have to go slow. I guess that's all now. Don't forget to send me the papers."

"I'll not. I suppose it's safe to talk over the 'phone this way."

"Of course. That's why I selected this time. There's no one here, and that central girl is off duty at night. Well, I guess——"

At that instant Tom's elbow accidentally touched the receiver hook, and depressed it sufficiently to produce a loud click in the instrument.

"What's that?" asked Barton Sandow, suddenly. "Is some one listening on this telephone?"

"No; I guess not," answered the lawyer. "It was only a click on the wire."

Tom smiled to himself, as he thought of how the click had been produced.

"Well, I'll have to go now," went on the lawyer. "I guess we've arranged everything. Don't forget the papers."

Then came another click, which told that San-

dow had hung up his receiver. A little later Tom heard the office door close behind Cutler.

"He's gone," the boy thought, "but I guess I heard enough. This settles the case. I wish it was morning, so I could tell Mr. Boise. I wonder what he'll do?"

In accordance with the plan, made the night before, the senior partner of the law firm came to his office very early the next morning. Tom was there waiting for him, and none of the clerks, nor the other two partners, had arrived.

"Well, Tom?" asked Mr. Boise anxiously, and our hero told all that he had heard.

"Too bad! Too bad!" murmured Mr. Boise. "Cutler is a bright young man. I am sorry to see him going wrong. Well, there is no help for it; I must expose him. You say Sandow is to send some papers to him this morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we must intercept them. Watch all the mail that comes for him, and bring it to me. I will arrange to send him to the court house to look up some records, so he will be out of the way."

Mr. Cutler seemed quite surprised when, as he came in a little later, he was told by Mr. Boise to go to the surrogate's office, to see about a certain will.

"But I have some matters here that require my

attention," he objected. "Can't one of the clerks go? I——"

"It is a very particular matter," replied Mr. Boise somewhat stiffly. "I prefer to have you do it."

"Very well," answered the junior partner. "Is there any mail for me?" he asked of Tom, for the postman used to lay all the letters on the telephone table, whence, after Tom had sorted them, a messenger boy distributed them to the different offices.

"No, sir," replied Tom.

"If any comes have it at once put in my desk," went on Mr. Cutler, "and see that it is not disturbed. I am expecting some important letters."

"Yes; I guess they are important," thought Tom.

With no very good grace Mr. Cutler left the office to go to the court house. He had not been gone more than an hour before a special messenger left a bulky package for him.

"These must be the deeds and mortgages, secured from Dr. Spidderkins by that rascally Sandow," thought Tom, as he left the switchboard for a moment, to take them to Mr. Boise.

"You had better remain here, Tom," said the senior lawyer. "I may want you to go to see Dr. Spidderkins. Tell Roscoe to take the switchboard for a while."

Roscoe was the young clerk who relieved Tom at noon.

"Yes, these are the papers," went on Mr. Boise, when Tom had returned to his office. "Ah, to what depths of depravity Cutler has sunk! He would commit a serious crime in order to enrich himself."

"Is it too late to save the property for Dr. Spidderkins?" asked Tom.

"No; fortunately you spoke in time. Had it not been for you the doctor would have lost nearly all he possessed. His sister-in-law seems to be in the game also. Her name is on some of the documents. Now I want you to hurry to the doctor's house. You must see him at once, and get those papers which I sent to him by you, some time ago. I will need them in arranging this matter. Do not let Mrs. Sandow know what you come for."

"All right," said Tom as he started off. "Here is where I get ahead of Sandow, and get even with him for calling me a gutter-pup," he added to himself.

Mrs. Sandow answered the door bell, as usual, when Tom rang. Probably the old doctor, if he ever heard it, forgot all about it as soon as the echoes of the peals died away.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the woman, in a sharp tone, as she saw Tom.

"I wish to see Dr. Spidderkins."

"Well, you can't. He's busy."

"But this is very important."

"I can't help it. You can give me the message, and I'll tell him when I get a chance."

"I am sorry, but I can't do that," said Tom firmly. "What I have to say is for the doctor personally." Then he had an idea. Raising his voice, so it would penetrate down the long hall to the doctor's private library, the boy said: "If I can't see Dr. Spidderkins now, I'll wait here until I can."

He fairly shouted the doctor's name.

"Look here, you young rapscallion," exclaimed the woman, "do you think I'm deaf?"

"I didn't know," replied Tom, innocently, in his ordinary tones. "I thought maybe you were."

But he had accomplished what he desired, for the doctor, hearing his name called, had roused himself long enough from poring over his books to emerge from his room. He came toward the front door.

"Who called me?" he asked. "I was just reading an account of the Marathon runner, who brought the news of that great victory. It is in a very rare volume, which I found yesterday on— Why, bless my soul! If it isn't the boy from the book store. Let me see, I think I never paid you that ten dollars. Very forgetful of me, I'm sure.

Come right in, and I'll get it. How is Mr. Townsend?"

"I'm not there any more," said Tom. "But you paid the ten dollars all right. Don't you remember, I thought I had lost it?"

"Oh, so you did. That was the night you brought me the rare volume about—er—um—well, really I have forgotten what it was about. But I remember now, you are an electrician."

"Not quite," said Tom, with a laugh, "but that's pretty near it. I'm a telephone boy, and I have a message for you."

"A telephone message?"

"Not exactly; though it's about a telephone."

"Come right into my study," went on the doctor. "I was just reading a book on—why, bless my soul, I've forgotten what it was about. Oh, my wretched memory! I must try to be more careful."

He pulled out an easy chair for Tom, and then stood in the middle of the room, looking about him in some bewilderment.

"What is the matter?" asked the boy.

"Why—er—I have forgotten what we came here for."

"I came here with a message for you."

"Oh, yes. About a book."

"No; from your lawyer, Mr. Boise."

"Oh, yes, yes. You are in a law office. I remember now."

"It's very important," went on Tom, in a low voice, approaching close to the aged physician. "Perhaps I had better shut the door."

"No, no," said the doctor. "Leave it open. If it's closed, she'll sneak up, and listen at the key hole. She's—she's a—a Tartar!" he exclaimed softly. "She makes life miserable for me. I don't wonder my poor brother died. Come, we'll go into an inner room. Then she can't hear us."

He opened a door of a smaller apartment, leading from the main library.

"This is where I keep the rarest books," said the doctor. "There is one volume of Horace here that is worth—well, I really have forgotten for the moment just how much it is worth, but I know it is quite valuable. I picked it up the same day I secured a copy of Plato—but there—what have you to tell me?"

"Mr. Boise wants those papers I brought to you one day. Those papers about your estate."

"Papers—did you bring me some papers?"

Tom was beginning to despair of ever getting the doctor to understand what was wanted.

"Don't you remember?" he asked. "It was the same day you secured that edition of Smollett," for Tom had an excellent memory.

"Oh, yes! Now I remember, of course. Why didn't you say that at first? The papers about my estate. Why, yes, of course. You brought them

up the day I secured that rare copy of Smollett. Of course, I remember now," and the doctor chuckled at his excellent memory, which never could remember anything unless it was associated with a book.

"Will you get those papers and bring them to Mr. Boise's office?" asked Tom. "He wants to see you at once. It's very important."

"Yes—yes, of course. Right away. The papers? Of course; let me see now, where did I put them?"

Tom felt like groaning. It seemed hopeless to try to get the old physician to remember where the documents were.

"Let me see," mused the physician. "Did I put them in my desk? I'll look."

He did without result. Then he explored a small safe, next a chest of drawers. Then he looked in all his pockets. Then he stared around at the rows of books.

"That's queer," he murmured. "I can't remember where I put them."

Tom thought instead of being queer that it was the most natural thing in the world for the doctor not to remember.

"Now where did I put them?" murmured the old man. "If I had only stuck them in some book, I'd be sure to remember them."

At this Tom gave an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Dr. Spidderkins.

"The book!" cried the boy. "Don't you remember? You put the papers under a volume of Fielding!"

For, like a flash, it had occurred to the boy what the doctor had done with the documents, and Tom recalled the mistake he had made about the book—thinking it had to do with baseball.

"Oh, yes, of course. Now I remember," cried Dr. Spidderkins. "That's where they are. I knew I would remember. I'll get them at once."

He went to where the book was. He had no difficulty in recalling where any volume, among his several thousand, was located on the shelves.

"Here is the book," he said. "A very rare edition. Now the papers——" Then a blank look came over his face. "The papers are gone!" he exclaimed.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### DR. SPIDDERKINS IS ANGRY

"PERHAPS I made a mistake, and that wasn't the book," remarked Tom.

"Oh, that was the book. I am positive about that. I have a bad memory, but when it comes to books it is pretty good. Especially when you speak of it. I am positive I put those papers either in or under that book."

"That's what I think, too," said Tom. "Maybe they have fallen down."

He and the doctor made a thorough search. They took out all the books in that part of the library, and looked behind them. They even searched through several volumes on either side of the Fielding, but no papers were to be found.

"Have you another volume of Mr. Fielding?" asked Tom.

"I have, yes; but it is only a cheap reprint, and I never would put valuable papers in or under that. No, I am sure the papers were here, but they are gone. What had I better do?"

At that moment there came a knock on the door of the inner room, which the physician had taken the precaution to lock.

"Hark!" exclaimed Dr. Spidderkins. "I thought I heard some one knocking."

"There was," answered Tom.

The knock was repeated, louder than before, and a voice which Tom recognized as that of the mean housekeeper said:

"Come, come! I can't stand here all day. I've got my work to do. Open the door, now, Dr. Spidderkins. I know you're in there, with that boy. Boys can't be trusted, that's been my experience with 'em. You'd better open the door. I'm sure his feet are muddy and I can't have my carpets all tracked up. Come, are you going to open that door, or not?"

"Isn't—isn't that some one speaking?" asked the aged physician, gently, as if there was the slightest doubt of it. Mrs. Sandow's harsh voice could have been heard through the whole house.

"I—I think it's the housekeeper," said Tom.

"Of course; to be sure," replied the doctor, in a tone of relief, as if a great uncertainty had been lifted from his mind. "It must be my housekeeper. I thought I recognized the voice, but I couldn't quite place it. I am afraid—I'm very much afraid —that my memory is going back on me."

Tom hadn't the slightest doubt of it.

"Well, are you going to let me in?" demanded Mrs. Sandow again. "I'd like to know what you mean, Lemuel, by locking the doors on me. I just want to know what you're up to! The idea of locking doors when I'm around. Come! Are you going to let me in?"

"Do you think I'd better?" inquired the doctor, of Tom. "She—she's a Tartar, you know."

"Perhaps you had better see what she wants," suggested the telephone boy.

"That's an excellent suggestion. I will act upon it."

The doctor tiptoed to the door, and, placing his lips close against a panel, whispered as loudly as he could:

"What do you want?"

"What do I want?" repeated Mrs. Sandow. "I want to come in, that's what I want. I have something to say to you. It's important. Let me in at once."

"You'll have to wait a moment," went on the physician.

"Wait? What for, I should like to know? Haven't I been waiting here, and knocking until I've almost worn the skin off my knuckles? Why should I wait any longer?"

But the doctor did not reply. Instead he tiptoed over to where Tom stood, a curious spectator and listener to what was going on.

"Shall I—shall I let her in?" asked the aged physician of the boy.

Tom could not help smiling. This seemed a matter for the doctor alone to settle. Yet he asked advice upon it.

"I suppose you had better," he replied.

"Yes, I suppose I had better," repeated Dr. Spidderkins. "She'd get in, anyhow," he added. "Oh, but she *is* a woman. There's no use talking, she certainly is a Tartar. I—I don't know when I ever met, or heard of, or read of, in all ancient history, for example, one to equal her. Lady Macbeth, perhaps. You recall Lady Macbeth, I presume?"

"Are you going to let me in, Dr. Spidderkins, or shall I have to go and get my duplicate keys, and open the door myself?" interrupted the harsh voice of the housekeeper.

"Did you hear that?" whispered the doctor. "Duplicate keys! I knew she must have some way of getting into this room. Once I found a copy of Dante, which I prized very highly, laid upside down on my table, and I'm almost certain that I left it right side up. But then my wretched memory——"

A rattling of the knob reminded him that the housekeeper was still waiting.

"Then you really think I'd better let her in?" again whispered the doctor to Tom.

The telephone boy nodded.

"Very well, I will, but say nothing to her about what you told me."

"I'll not," replied Tom.

The doctor unlocked the door. Mrs. Sandow, who had, just as the doctor suspected she would, made her way to the library, was seen standing in a belligerent attitude in that apartment.

"Well, it's taken you long enough to open the door," she snapped.

"Yes, we—we were very busy," said Dr. Spidderkins.

"I'd like to know what that good-for-nothing boy is doing here all the while?" went on the angry woman.

As no one offered to enlighten her she glared at Tom.

"Did—er—did you want to speak to me?" asked the physician, and Tom waited anxiously for the answer. He thought it might have something to do with the matter in hand.

"Of course I want to speak to you," said Mrs. Sandow. "Do you think I'd come all the way here from my kitchen, and waste my time knocking at locked doors, though for the life of me I can't see why you should lock you door, for I'm sure I don't want to take any of your old books, no matter what others may wish, but then of course——" Here Mrs. Sandow appeared to forget what she had

started out to say, but she switched off on another tack and asked:

"Do you remember me telling you that the water pipes in the kitchen would need fixing?"

"I—er—I seem to remember——" began the doctor.

"No, you don't remember, and that's just the trouble. You don't remember anything. You'd forget to eat if I didn't call you."

"Oh, now I remember!" cried the doctor. "It was about the furnace. You said we'd need a new grate. I knew I would remember that, because I associated it in my mind with a book about Alexander the Great, and——"

"No, no! Nothing of the sort," interrupted Mrs. Sandow. "That was last year when the grate broke, and you had to get a new one. This is about the water pipes in the kitchen. What I came to tell you was that one had burst, the water is spouting all over the room, and we need a plumber right away!"

"Bless my soul! Why didn't you say so at once?" asked the doctor, in some alarm.

"I would have, only you had your door locked, and an honest person can't make her way about," and the housekeeper looked very much hurt.

"I'll get a plumber at once," said the doctor. "I know where there is one, on this street, or is it

the next street?—I can't seem to remember now——"

"And the water is squirting all over the kitchen," went on Mrs. Sandow. "It ought to be shut off, only I don't know where to shut it off. That's another secret about this house," she added significantly.

"I think I can find out the place to shut it off," said Tom. "Very likely it's down in the cellar."

"Humph! It's a good thing you know something," said Mrs. Sandow, with a sniff.

In a few moments the telephone boy had shut off the water, and the plumber had been summoned. That mechanic promised to come at once, and repair the leak.

"If you had attended to the pipe when I told you to," went on Mrs. Sandow, when the excitement had somewhat calmed down, "this never would have happened."

"I meant to," said the doctor, "but I forgot——"

"You're always forgetting," interrupted his sister-in-law. "Some day you'll forget to come home, or lose yourself and then——"

"I've lost something now," exclaimed the doctor. "We were just hunting for something when you knocked, Mrs. Sandow. Have you seen——"

Tom was attacked with a sudden fit of coughing.

He wanted to attract the doctor's attention, and warn him not to speak of the papers.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the physician, when he saw what a spasm Tom was having. "That's a terrible cough. You must take something for it. I would write you a prescription, only I have such a wretched memory that I might start to give you something for a cough, and end up by writing out directions how to cure the mumps. You haven't the mumps, have you?"

"I had them once, and that was enough," said Tom. "But, doctor, perhaps I had better call another time."

Tom thought that if he went away, and came back, he would have a chance to speak to the physician alone, and warn him.

But the doctor did not seem to understand. He knew he had been looking for something, and that he had not found it. He appealed to the housekeeper, and Tom began to fear that all his plans would miscarry.

However, Mrs. Sandow, likely thinking that with such a poor memory to depend on she could obtain no information from the doctor, or else recollecting that her kitchen was covered with water from the burst pipe, hurried from the room. Tom saw his chance, and took it.

"I didn't want to speak of the papers before her," he said. "She might——"

"Oh, yes, it was papers we were looking for," interrupted the doctor. "I remember now. We couldn't find them. But they must be here somewhere. I'll look in some other valuable books."

But the papers were not to be found. Search as the two did, in all likely and unlikely places, the missing documents were not disclosed.

"I guess we can't find them," spoke Tom.

"It does look that way," admitted the doctor. "I wonder what we had better do next?"

The aged physician seemed quite helpless in the face of this emergency.

"You had better come with me to see Mr. Boise," suggested Tom. "He can tell you what to do. I may say to you, Dr. Spidderkins, that your estate is in danger."

"In danger? From whom?"

"I am not sure that Mr. Boise would want me to tell you, but I will risk saying that he suspects Mr. and Mrs. Sandow."

"What? Those two whom I have trusted in everything?"

"Mr. Boise suspects them, and also suspects a young lawyer in his office."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the doctor. "I know nothing about business. All I know about is books. Do you suppose they have got everything I possess? I used to be a rich man."

He was quite distressed, but Tom hastened to

assure him that he thought the plot had been discovered in time.

"I left everything to Mr. and Mrs. Sandow," went on the physician. "I gave them money whenever they wanted it, and I signed the checks they made out for the tradesmen's bills. Now to think how they have repaid me!"

"We had better hurry down to the office," urged Tom. "I think Mr. Boise will be waiting for you."

"Very well, I will go at once. Let me see, where did I put that book I was reading? Oh, here it is. I think I will take it along with me. It may calm my mind."

He started from the library, Tom following. The doctor got to the door, and was going out, when the telephone boy called his attention to the fact that he had neither hat nor coat on, and there was a cold March wind blowing.

"Bless my soul! I forgot all about a hat," admitted the aged physician. "I am getting quite forgetful. I was wondering where I could get a copy of the first edition of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus. I have only a common edition, and I want a rare one. Thank you," he added, as Tom handed him his hat and coat from the rack.

"Where are you going, Lemuel?" asked Mrs. Sandow, as she suddenly appeared in the hall.

"I—I am going out," answered the doctor mildly.

"Going out? This cold day! You forgot you were to sign some checks for the grocer and butcher."

"I thought I made out those checks."

"No; they were for the milkman and the coal dealer."

"Well, I suppose I must make them out."

"Perhaps they will do when we get back," suggested Tom, for he had an idea the woman was only carrying out the general plan of herself and her husband, to cheat Dr. Spidderkins out of as much money as possible by getting him to sign extra checks.

"What do you know about it, young man?" asked Mrs. Sandow sharply.

"The doctor is in a hurry to get to his lawyer's office, and I thought the checks might wait until he returned."

"Are you going to a lawyer's office?" asked Mrs. Sandow, with suspicion in her tone.

"I—I believe so—or was it the book store?" replied Dr. Spidderkins.

"The lawyer's first, and then, if you like, to the book store," answered Tom with a smile at the old man's eccentricities.

"You had better stay in," suggested Mrs. San-

dow, in more gentle tones. "It is very cold out, and perhaps I can go for you."

Dr. Spidderkins hesitated. It was easy for Tom to see that the woman exercised considerable control over the aged physician. But the telephone boy was determined to frustrate her schemes.

"We had better hurry," said Tom, taking hold of the old man's arm. "Mr. Boise will be waiting for us."

"Yes—yes, we must hurry," assented the doctor. "I'll be back soon, Mrs. Sandow, and perhaps," he added significantly, "you will not be so glad to see me."

"Not glad to see you? Why, I am always glad to see you, Lemuel," said the woman, with a whine. "I am very fond of you. I was only anxious for your own good, when I spoke."

"And for your own, and your husband's," thought Tom.

The woman saw it would be useless to protest further. Tom and his aged friend left, boarded a car, and were riding toward the law office.

Once there Mr. Boise soon explained to the doctor the plots of Mr. and Mrs. Sandow. The documents, which had come in the mail to Mr. Cutler, proved to be deeds and mortgages which the physician had, unknowingly, signed the night before.

They transferred the control of most of his property to his rascally relatives.

"Is it too late to prevent the loss of my estate?" asked the doctor.

"Well, I am afraid you will lose some of it," replied the lawyer. "They have been deceiving you for a long time, and, very likely, they have a good share of your money now. You have been so wrapped up in your books, that you did not know about it."

"Can't we prevent them from getting away with it?" asked Dr. Spidderkins, as he seemed to rouse to sudden anger at the thought of the manner in which he had been swindled.

"Yes, perhaps, if we act promptly."

"Then let's act promptly!" exclaimed the physician. "We'll go back to my house and we'll clean the rascals out, bag and baggage! I'm an old man, but when I get roused up I'm as good as a young one!"

To look at him one would not doubt this, for the doctor seemed to have grown several years younger. He had been carrying a book but now he thrust it into his pocket as if it was of no value. He was thoroughly in earnest.

"Come on," he said, to Tom and Mr. Boise. "We'll go and see if we can't end their plots! I'll have something to say to Mr. and Mrs. Sandow that they won't like."

"That's the way to talk!" exclaimed Mr. Boise admiringly. "You've been too much engrossed in your books heretofore, Dr. Spidderkins."

"I guess I have. I need some honest persons to look after me. Well, maybe I'll get them, after this affair is over."

Accompanied by Tom and Mr. Boise the doctor went back home, to "clear the rascals out," as he expressed it several times, on the ride to the Back Bay district.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FLIGHT

"SUPPOSE we should be too late," suggested the doctor, as they neared the house.

"I think we will be in time," replied Mr. Boise. "Of course Mrs. Sandow may become suspicious over what happened while Tom was there, and she may inform her husband. But they can do little now."

"Can we get back what they have already taken?" inquired the physician. "I am not overly fond of money, in fact all I use it for is to buy books, but I do not like to be robbed and cheated, especially by those whom I have befriended. When my brother died I told his widow she could live with me as my housekeeper. Then, when she got married again, I still allowed her and her husband to live in my house. And this is the way they have repaid me!"

"I fancy we will be able to make them give up their ill-gotten spoils," remarked the lawyer. "But we must first catch them."

"You say one of your partners was mixed in with Sandow in the game?" asked Dr. Spidderkins.

"Yes; I am sorry to say Mr. Cutler seems to be involved. Without his aid Barton Sandow could not have done what he has. But I shall deal with him, and also with a man named Leeth, who aided him and Sandow."

"I was just wondering if perhaps that Cutler might not suspect something, and give the Sandows warning," suggested the doctor.

"I never thought of that," admitted Mr. Boise. "He may do so. Still, it is too late now. We will go to your house. I want to have a talk with Mrs. Sandow."

"And I'd like to meet that rascally husband of hers," added the doctor grimly. "I'll have something to say to him."

"I fancy Mrs. Sandow is as guilty as her husband," went on Mr. Boise. "She knew of your wealth, and probably suggested to him that they try to secure control of it. Well, they very nearly succeeded. But we are getting near your home, are we not, Dr. Spidderkins?"

"Yes; we'll get out at the next corner."

They alighted and turned up the long walk to the house.

"Now, if you haven't forgotten your key, we

can get in without ringing the bell," said the lawyer.

Dr. Spidderkins began to search through his various pockets.

"There!" he exclaimed. "There's that letter I forgot to mail. It's about some choice books, too. Bless my soul, but I am getting forgetful. Let's see, what was it I was looking for?"

"Your key," replied Tom.

"Oh, yes. Well, this must be it. For a wonder I didn't forget to bring it."

"Perhaps we can surprise Mrs. Sandow," suggested the lawyer. "Don't make any more noise than you can help."

Softly the door was opened, and then on tiptoes they entered the hall. The house seemed strangely quiet.

"She'll probably be in the sitting-room," suggested the physician, but the woman was not there. Nor was she in any of the downstairs apartments.

"Look in her bedroom," proposed the lawyer.

The three ascended the stairs. No voice called to know who was coming up. The house remained quiet.

"I guess she's gone," said Mr. Boise.

"I'm afraid so," admitted Dr. Spidderkins.

A glance into Mrs. Sandow's room showed that she had taken flight. The apartment was in confusion. Clothing was scattered about, as though

she had hastily packed what she could, and gone off.

"This is too bad!" exclaimed Mr. Boise. "I depended on making her confess, before she saw her husband. She has probably joined him."

"And taken a lot of my money with her," added the physician. "I only hope they did not disturb my valuable books. I must look and see."

A hasty search convinced him that his precious volumes were undisturbed in the library.

"I wonder where she has gone to?" mused the lawyer. "I would like to find her."

Tom, who was in the front hall, uttered an exclamation as he picked up a scrap of yellow paper.

"Here's part of a telegram," he said.

"So it is. Perhaps Sandow telegraphed for her to meet him. Can you make out any words on it, Tom?"

"There are parts of some words, and two complete ones. It reads: '—eet me at Park—' and then comes a tear."

"See if we can't find the other pieces," suggested the doctor. "She probably tore it up, and scattered them about."

But a close search failed to reveal anything more. The remainder of the telegram appeared to be destroyed.

"Let's use a little detective ability, and see if

we can't guess what the entire telegram was," suggested Mr. Boise.

"This is about the middle part of a telegraph blank," said Tom.

"How do you know?" asked the doctor.

"I can tell from the printing on the back. I once worked as a messenger boy for a few weeks."

"That's one point," remarked Mr. Boise. "If this is the middle part of the message, there must have been several words before these, and some after them. Probably the first part told Mrs. Sandow that everything was discovered. Then came this sentence 'Meet me at Park—'; but what park is there around here?"

"None where they would be likely to meet," replied Tom, who knew that part of Boston pretty well by this time. "I have it!" he exclaimed. "It isn't a park. It's Parker House. I saw Sandow there one night!"

"That's it! Why didn't I think of that!" exclaimed Mr. Boise. "Tom, you'll be a better lawyer than I am, if you keep on."

"Come on then!" said Dr. Spidderkins. "We must go to the Parker House and arrest them! They shan't get away with my money if I can help it!"

"We'd better hurry," suggested Tom. "The Parker House is quite a ride from here."

"I have a better plan than that," remarked the

lawyer. "I'll telephone to my office, and have Mr. Keen get a policeman and go to the Parker House. He can get there before we will, and he can cause the arrest of the couple."

"Good!" cried the doctor. "There's a telephone in my house here, but I always forget to use it, and whenever I want anything I generally walk after it. Now it will come in handy."

Mr. Boise was soon in communication with Mr. Keen, and told him how to proceed.

"Arrest them at once," said the elderly lawyer. "What's that? Cutler came back, took some papers from his desk, and hurried away again? Well, say nothing about that until I return.

"I think we have seen the last of Mr. Cutler," remarked Mr. Boise as he hung up the receiver. "Well, perhaps it is better so. I should have gotten rid of him in any event."

"Perhaps he has some papers belonging to me," said Dr. Spidderkins.

"No. Before we came away I went through his desk, and I took out all the documents referring to your estate. But I hope Keen is in time."

"Let's go and see," suggested the physician, and, locking up his house, he, together with Mr. Boise and Tom, hurried to the Parker House.

## CHAPTER XXV

### TOM'S PROMOTION—CONCLUSION

NEVER had a trolley car seemed to travel so slowly as did that one from the Back Bay section, in which the three anxious ones rode. But finally they reached their destination. As they hurried into the lobby of the hotel they were met by Mr. Keen.

"Well?" asked Mr. Boise anxiously.

"We caught them just in time," replied his partner. "They had engaged a cab, and had tickets to New York, when I appeared on the scene with an officer, and placed them under arrest."

"Where are they now?"

"Safe in a room, with a policeman on guard. I thought that better than taking them to the station house, as I believe they will confess, and make restitution. They are both badly frightened."

This proved to be the case. All the bluster had gone from Mr. Sandow, and his wife was no longer the sneering woman she had been. She was

weeping in one corner of the room as Dr. Spidderkins and his friends entered.

"So, this is the way you repay me for my kindness to you both, is it?" the aged physician exclaimed.

"Oh, Lemuel, forgive me!" pleaded his sister-in-law. "I don't know why we did it! But you had so much money and we didn't have any."

"I would always have provided you with a comfortable home," went on the doctor. "But now I will compel you to give up what you stole, and I will turn you out of my house."

"We'll—we'll give it all back, Lemuel," promised Mrs. Sandow. "We didn't spend much of it. That lawyer got some, but the rest we have."

"Yes; Eli Cutler is as guilty as we are," added Mr. Sandow. "Why don't you arrest him?"

"Perhaps we will," replied Mr. Boise. "But are you now ready to turn over to Dr. Spidderkins all that you took belonging to him?"

"I suppose so," mumbled Sandow.

"If they do I think it would be better to avoid the notoriety of an arrest and prosecution," suggested the lawyer to his client.

Dr. Spidderkins nodded, and thus the matter was arranged. Sandow turned over to the lawyer certain valuable papers, bonds and mortgages which he had managed to secure from the doctor,

chiefly through that old gentleman's forgetfulness about business details. The scheming couple had also secured considerable cash, by the simple process of making the doctor make out checks twice for the same bill. The second checks they kept for themselves.

"There will be no prosecution, in case you leave Boston and never return," said Mr. Boise, when the details had been completed, and most of Dr. Spidderkins' stolen fortune had been restored to him. "Do you agree to that?"

"We have to, I suppose," remarked Sandow.

He and his wife left the Parker House, taking their baggage with them. The police officer escorted them to the depot—to see that they took the train.

"Now that this disagreeable business is over, I think I can return to my home and my books," remarked Dr. Spidderkins. "I suppose you will deal with Mr. Cutler?"

"I do not think there will be a chance," replied Mr. Boise. "I fancy he is far enough away from here by this time."

After events proved that he was, for he sailed for England with his ill-gotten gains, which, however, were much smaller than they would have been, had not Tom heard that mysterious message going over the wire, and acted as he did. Mr.

Leeth also disappeared, but he had secured only a small sum.

"I can not tell you how much I am indebted to you, for what you have done for me, Mr. Boise," went on the doctor. "If it had not been for you I would be a poor man to-day, and I could never buy any more choice books."

"Don't thank me; thank Tom. He is the hero on this occasion," replied the lawyer, looking at the telephone boy. "He engineered all this, and, by revealing to me the duplicity of my partner, enabled me to act in time to save your wealth. Had it not been for Tom we never could have succeeded."

"That's so," agreed the doctor heartily. "I had nearly forgotten that. Oh, what shall I do about my treacherous memory? But I'll not forget you, Tom. I am a little tired over this excitement, but I will call on you this evening, and properly express my appreciation. Where do you live?"

Tom gave him the address, the physician writing it down on the fly leaf of a book, as the best place for such an important memorandum.

"You need not report back to the office, Tom," said his employer. "I fancy you have done enough for one day."

"Thank you," replied our hero, as he left the hotel and went home.

It seemed that Mrs. Baldwin, and Tom's Aunt

Sallie would never finish asking questions about what had happened, when Tom told them the occurrences of the day.

"And to think that you did the most part," exclaimed his aunt.

"Oh, well, it just happened so," replied Tom, who was nothing if not modest. "I guess the telephone did the most part. That's a wonderful invention."

They were talking in the small sitting-room after supper that evening, when there came a knock on the door.

"I'll go," said Tom, and when he opened the portal there stood Dr. Spidderkins.

"Does Tom Baldwin——" he began, when he saw the boy who had been of such service to him. "Why, of course, there you are," he finished. "I guess I must have knocked at half a dozen houses. You see I wrote your address down in a book, and then I forgot what book I had written it in. But I called up Mr. Boise and, fortunately, he remembered it. I have come to thank you for what you did for me."

"Come in," invited Tom, and he ushered the guest into the modest sitting-room.

"This is my mother, Dr. Spidderkins," he said, "and my aunt, Miss Ramsey."

"Ramsey—Ramsey——" repeated the physician. "Why, I used to know a Ramsey family.

Let me see, there was a Jeanette Ramsey—and a Sallie Ramsey—and—why, bless my soul—you're Jeanette Ramsey, aren't you?" and he looked at Tom's mother.

"That was my name before I was married. But is this the Dr. Spidderkins that used to live in Lowell?"

"The very same. Bless my soul! I suppose I've grown so old you wouldn't know me, but I'd remember you anywhere," said the doctor gallantly, with a bow to the ladies. "Bless my soul! To think of meeting you again, after all these years. Tom, you young rascal, why didn't you tell me your mother was Jeanette Ramsey, with whom I used to play when I was a boy, though I was ever so much older than she was?"

"You never asked me," replied Tom.

The doctor spent a pleasant evening with his former friends, talking over old times.

"I heard Tom speak of a Dr. Spidderkins," said Mrs. Baldwin, "but I did not know it was the one I used to know."

"Well, well, this is a strange world," mused the old gentleman. "But I am nearly forgetting what I came for, in the excitement of meeting you two ladies again. Tom, I want to show my appreciation of what you did for me. I understand from Mr. Boise that you want to study law. There is no better profession in the world. Now

I am going to send you to college and then to a law school. I expect you to graduate with honors, and then you can look after my legal business for me, for I am getting to have such a bad memory that I need a guardian. Will you go, Tom?"

Tom was silent a moment. The offer was so unexpected that it nearly took his breath away. He had never dreamed of such advancement.

"Well," asked Dr. Spidderkins, inquiringly, "I hope you don't prefer being a telephone boy to becoming a lawyer?"

"Oh, no. If I could study law I think I would like it better than anything else."

"Then you shall study law," went on the doctor firmly. "It's the least I can do for you, after you saved my fortune for me. After you graduate I shall see that you do not lack for practice.

"There is another matter. Now that the Sandows are gone I shall be all alone in that big house. That would never do. I need some one to look after me, or I would forget to eat. Won't you come and take charge of the place, Mrs. Baldwin? I would pay you and Miss Ramsey well, and it would be a good home for Tom."

It did not need much urging to have the two women give up their sewing work, which had paid very poorly of late, and accept the doctor's offer. Within a week they were established in the Spidderkins mansion, and Tom had been entered at

college, where he was to make a specialty of law.

One evening, not long after this, Tom was called to the telephone, in the doctor's house. He heard a girl's voice speaking.

"Is this Tom Baldwin?" she asked.

"Yes. Who is this?"

"I thought you were coming over to see my brother, and learn something about a telephone switchboard," came back over the wire, followed by a jolly laugh.

"Oh, so I am. Why, it's—it's Minnie Renfield!" exclaimed Tom, as he recognized the voice of the central girl, who had done him such a good turn.

"Of course it is," she replied. "When are you coming over?"

"I don't need to learn about a switchboard any more," replied Tom. "I'm going to study law. But I'm coming to see—your brother, just the same."

Minnie laughed.

Tom went at the difficult study of law as he had done at learning how to operate a switchboard, and he did well. Soon after our hero left the law office, Charley Grove took his place, as the brokerage firm he was with failed, and Charley made a most efficient telephone operator.

As for Tom, when he graduated, and had to spend some time in a law office, before he could

be admitted to the bar, he naturally selected the firm of Boise & Keen, for Mr. Cutler's name was dropped after his flight.

To-day the firm is Boise, Keen & Baldwin, for Tom, in a few years, was made the junior member. He no longer lives in Dr. Spidderkins' house, though his mother and aunt continue to reside there, for Tom is married, but I don't believe you can guess who the young lady was. What's that? Minnie Renfield, the telephone girl? Why, how ever in the world did you guess it, boys?

THE END